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ABSTRACT

Intended for newspaper writers and editors, this collection of articles includes the following titles and authors: "VDTs, TV Haven't Shocked Editors" by Jay Rogers; "Opinions Vary on Electronics' Effect" by Bob Nordyke; "A Few Kind Words for the Censors" by Hugh A. Mulligan; "Those Awards Have Their Limitations" by Larry Fortner; "Obituaries Are Written for the Living" by Bob Conley; "A Sample Guide to Obituary Writing" from the Milwaukee Sentinel Stylebook; "The Rewrite Bank Is Not Dead--Yet" by Thomas B. Debley; "Sports Columnists Offer Chuckles" by Fred Russell; "'Word' Called Useful, Not Panacea" by John H. Fisher; "'The Word,' a Drama in One Act" by James A. Crook; "More Editors Appealing to Young" by Tom Burton; "History 'Incomplete' Without News" by Joe Goodman; "Editorial-Page Kitchen Bound to Over-Heat" by W. Lawrie Joslin; and "'Tailored' Paper to Answer Dreams" by Clark Hoyt and Trueman Farris. (EL)

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LOUISVILLE 1985

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EDITORS IN THE ELECTRONIC AGE

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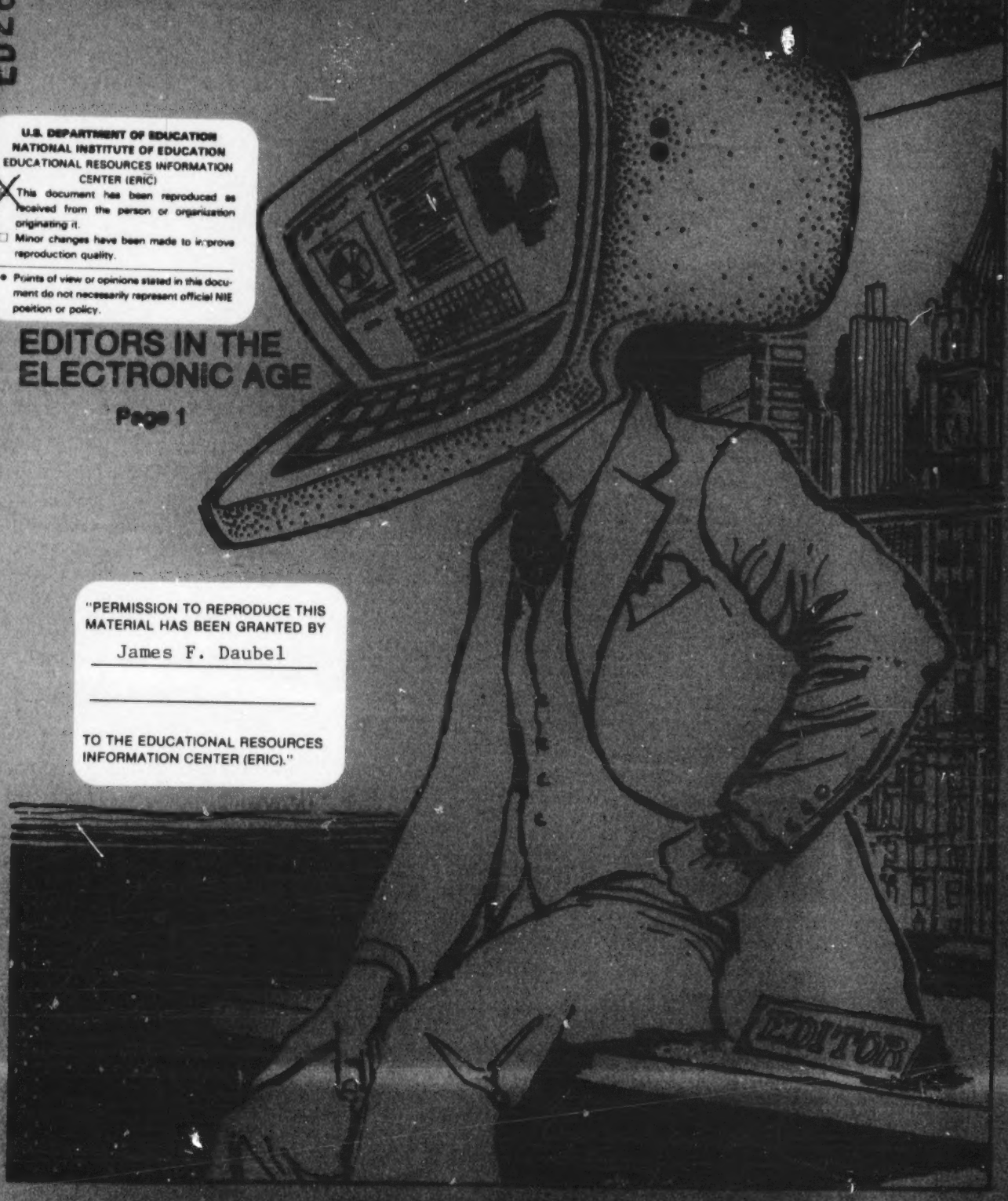

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Menu

The electronic age — both inside the newsroom and as outside competition via television — hasn't shocked the news editor on newspapers with more than 100,000 circulation into a new role, an APME survey indicates.

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A survey of editors of papers with less than 100,000 circulation found that most believed that electronic gadgetry has changed their work, but there's divided opinion on whether the changes have made their jobs easier or more difficult.

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The cover illustration is by Jim Lunde, a staff artist of The Milwaukee Sentinel.

VDTs, TV haven't shocked editors

By Jay Rogers
San Antonio Express and News

The electronic age — both inside the newsroom and as outside competition via television — hasn't shocked the news editor on larger newspapers into a new role, an APME survey indicates.

What impact there has been on the key position in newsrooms has generally been for the good, those who responded to the APME questionnaire say.

In the 100,000 and over circulation survey, 36 editors responded.

Of those, 12 felt the advent of the electronic age has affected the news editor's function, while 23 felt there has been no effect. The general feeling was electronic "gadgetry" has made the news editor's job easier and given the editors more flexibility.

The 36 editors were evenly divided on whether TV has affected their jobs. Those who felt it has, though, generally agreed TV has made them more aware of competition, spurring their papers to get fresher leads and generally to be more alert to what is happening to their communities.

Only four editors felt off-beat stories are played up as a result of more competition from TV. Many said they always have attempted to make a place for off-beat stories, most finding some place for these stories on Page One. Several said they have always strived for this "reader mix."

Only seven felt the varying number of columns on a page complicated the news editor's job. One noted this gives the news editors a better chance to display special news.

Twelve editors felt there is some swamping of the news editor through high-speed wires. Most, however, felt the wide array of news stories available allows the editor to do a better job.

Twenty-nine felt AP copy does get proper handling, but some indicated some problems with AP's methods of slugging stories and its selection of stories.

Only two editors found the use of a no-paper desk any problem. Most noted printers are available — and used — to provide hard copy where needed, such as in selection of one version of a story when several are available.

Yes, there is a workable alarm-bell system, 11 editors said. In most cases, this is available through a computer system to flash a message at the top of selected editor's terminals when an urgent or bulletin shows up in the system from the wire service.

"VDTs certainly have changed the nature of the news editor's job," Curt Pierson of the Spokesman-Review and Spokane Chronicle, said. "They have made it easier. I think news editors today are much less fillers of space and much more good judges of what's available than in the old days," he said, summing up a general feeling of the editors.

"No, any news editor who allows himself to be distracted (whether by VDTs, pencils, scanners or paper tape) shouldn't be a news editor. We had one who became fascinated by VDTs. He's now systems manager," one editor — whose answer came in anonymously — said.

Murry Burt of the Winnipeg Free Press says the "production burden (aspects of pagination, but not full pagination) has slowed things at the desk but helped deadlines. But there is no doubt the new functions take attention away from copy content more than some of us like. I look at full pagination on news desk to some day ease some of this."

Charles L. Byars of The State in Columbia, S.C. says a news editor is now "more of a super traffic cop . . . . News editor must delegate more 'editing' chores to sub-editors and lift his head out of the tube."

Keith Chrostowski of the Kansas City Times says a well-organized desk will allow good judgment to continue. He says while "typesetting has become fantastically faster, the VDTs have slowed down the copy editing process, and there is a need for more copy editors." This is because "there is no proofreader behind the editor and the editor has become, in effect, a Linotype operator." But he indicates changes brought on by VDTs have improved the news editor's judgment capabilities.

C.W. Davey of The Sun in Vancouver, B.C., says, "Only news editors who want it that way have been trapped in the VDT swamp. Some of them who have always been more copy technicians than editors have reveled in the goop, but for the really creative news editors (the VDTs) have been a liberating force giving him the ability to search very large volumes of material for the best stories quickly and to make intelligent judgments."

John H. Plunkett, assistant ME of the Baltimore Sun, says his paper has "adopted twin slots, since the checking function is more complex, and enlarged the universal (national, foreign, metro) desk. With pagination, a divided desk may become necessary."

"We are not pagination yet, but we have

Is there an electronic age shock wave in the newsroom?

Question	Yes	No
Has electronic age affected news editor's function?	12	23*
Has TV news impacted on news editor?	18	18
Are off-beat stories played up as a result?	4	32
Do 6-, 9-, 10-column page layouts complicate news editor's job?	7	29
Have high-speed wires swamped the news editor?	12	24
Is AP copy being delivered and handled properly?	29	7
Is the no-paper wire desk a problem for the news editor?	2	31**
Does anyone have a workable alarm bell system?	11	23

*1 has no VDTs
**4 do not use no-paper system

increased to three makeup persons in laying out the paper on most days," Lawrence S. Conmor of The Indianapolis Star says. "News editor for P-1 and jumps; one makeup man handles wire news; the third, local copy."

Jerry Ceppos of the San Jose Mercury says, "It seems to me that, in this complex world, the jobs of editing copy and displaying that copy should be split, if the newspaper is large enough to afford that. Pagination makes that even more necessary."

George Sutton of the Austin American-Statesman notes his paper has "layout and editing functions divided between two desks now, and I foresee no change in that makeup."

Gary Deckelnick of the Asbury Park Press says there is "a move toward twin copy desks or combined copy desks — universal desks with a couple of paginators."

(The Asbury Park Press now has three paginators (Hastech) in operation in the newsroom and four in the composing room for ads. Frank O'Hern, Panorama editor who's overseeing the paper's still-budding pagination system, says the Press is now doing about 130 editorial pages a week on the paginators — all sports, entertainment and some Sunday covers.

(He says the paginators will be used soon in the news area, and if technical problems don't prevent it the paper should be 100% paginated in a year.

(O'Hearn says the dual-screen Hastech — one screen does the editing functions and the other forms the page — has the capablity to easily shift copy from one screen to the other.

(The paper started out continuing the use of paper diagrams to do the layouts, O'Hearn said, but is trying to move away from that — to forming the page strictly on the paginator. Stories are given to rim editors with general instructions for head size and length. Returned to the slot, the slot editor moves them into the pagination screen and shifting from screen to screen modifies them to best fit the story's newshole.)

Burt, who looks forward to full pagination lessening the loss of attention to content from the advent of VDTs, says "We haven't tried a twin copy desk arrangement, and don't expect to have the manpower to do so."

Chrostowski says "layout will really become complicated when pagination comes along. It will be impossible for a news desk of two or three people to dummy the news sections, as we did in the past.

"We have split the makeup duties and given each originating desk — city, state, national, financial — responsibility for the space allotted to it by the news desk. Within that space, and with news desk supervision, the originating desk controls story length and play, and does the layout," Chrostowski says.

But he adds the "news desk has retained strict control over Page One. In fact, by decentralizing news judgment and layout duties, the news editors have more time to scrutinize the Page One offers.

"We also have more time to keep tabs on the originating desks, both by talking to them and electronically. The news editor can get into the mailboxes, or directories, to see what is going on. I feel better informed with the VDTs; I can cover a lot of ground quickly," Chrostowski said.

Generally, editors felt TV and the cable 24-hour news operation have made editors more aware of competition but have not resulted in newspapers playing up off-beat stories.

Chrostowski feels all of this competition "has not distored basic news judgment; it has made it sharper.

"When TV starts getting really serious, I'll start playing the hell out of off-beat stories," he said, following a general feeling of editors that there is no need to play up off-beat news, since TV and radio do this.

John Davenport of the Dallas Morning News said the main impact of TV and cable TV news seems to be "giving the managing editor and the executive editor more reasons for calling at night." He added in a market with very competitive and very respected TV stations, "They keep us on our toes."

He said the DMN takes into consideration the "freshness" of a story that has been on radio or TV all day and weighs "timing in as a factor" if they get a story after 10:30 p.m.

"And yes, I'm sure we react if TV is playing a story big and our initial judgment was that the story was not that significant. The question then becomes, 'Does the public believe you are ignoring a big story or did you miss it or don't you care about it?' "

Dennis Ellsworth, news editor of the Witchita Eagle-Beacon, says more and more people are catching the news later by watching such shows as ABC's Nightline. For that reason "papers that go to press at midnight cannot afford to skip something that happened at 11 ..."

He adds his paper is very careful not to resort to off-beat stories but does look for Page One brighteners that "may not be anything more than really interesting to the majority of our readers. They don't dominate the page or the paper; there is no sense of imbalance; on occasion, though, there is a true feeling from the readers that this paper has a personality, that it doesn't exist in a vacuum."

Jerry Cooley of the Syracuse Herald-Journal says, "TV news has sharpened awareness of graphics. It has increased our use of color."

Wendell Trogdon, assistant managing editor of The Indianapolis News, says his paper is now six columns throughout the paper. But when it was 6-news and 9-ad, the "news editor indeed considered himself a space engineer. He can now use the same width on all columns, unless he wants to vary it."

News Editor Carl Beyer and Wire Editor Sam Rubin of the Dayton Daily News agree this is a problem, but add "we try to deal with it. We do not allow the shape of the newshole to influence what we think is news, only the way we display it."

One editor noted it meant the news editor had to brush up on his math, and another noted a table of pica widths for varying layout mixes (4 on 4, 2 on 2½, 7 on 8, etc.) kept next to the VDT is very helpful.

Allan M. Siegal, New York Times news editor, says his paper is "indeed swamped in repeats of stories that have changed only slightly, and it complicates life."

"This is a real danger, but the return of the copy taster to major news room (we have one masquerading as a late afternoon-early evening wire editor) is one way of heading off this problem," Bob Davey, of the Vancouver Sun, says.

Our anonymous editor says that "evaluation of NEWS stories hasn't changed. Evaluation of drivel is increasingly time consuming."

"It's unquestionably tougher," says Dick Pryne of The Seattle Times, "with many supplemental wires. Our answer has been to put assistant telegraph editors on both day and night shifts to sort out and collate material. The supplemental wires are valuable, often superior to the main trunk wire," he adds.

Paul Wagner of the Chicago Sun-Times says the job has become "more and more difficult because of the growing number of marginal stories that never would have made the wire before the high-speed era."

John Chamless, copy desk chief of the Dayton Journal Herald, agrees with Wagner. "The high-speed wires have created a problem, but the supplementals haven't. There are just too many things moving (both on Associated Press wires and on Laserphoto machines) that aren't worth using. Often, it looks like AP is searching for excuses to update stories and a lot of the update is inconsequential or downright silly (editors are paid to catch typos). Also, AP has a tendency to butcher stories by throwing new tops on them, even when the new information isn't nearly as important as the earlier information. This could be a reaction to television and radio and the immediacy they present. But it makes rotten journalism."

Generally, editors felt AP is moving to the right place promptly, but Wagner added "we find the priority coding unreliable and thus can't disregard any stories without first reading them."

Dennis Ellsworth of the Wichita Eagle-Beacon complains his paper has "persistent problems with codings changing on advance copy, so that advance stories for our Lifestyle and Business / Farm sections will move in one queue one week and in another the following week."

Dick Pryne of The Seattle Times says the chief problem "has been in comparing several versions of the same story. Even split-screen only allows comparison of two sto-

ries at a time. We sort out Page One possibilities in a special queue for news editor's consideration."

Allan Siegal of The New York Times says, "We don't think a paperless system would work for us. It might get the copy sorted. and the leads read, but we want someone to be responsible for spotting useful stuff in the bottoms of stories, and it would never happen without paper."

John Davenport says he feels the "end of hard copy was mostly a psychological blow" and says the Dallas Morning News' no-paper system is "more efficient and conventional."

Generally, the survey indicated there are computer system programs which serve as an alarm bell for bulletins.

Ellsworth says the Wichita Eagle-Bulletin uses a "hotwire" message system that flashes a warning to all wire editors in the event of an important news break.

James Vesely of The Detroit News says the news system they are getting (SII) will have an automatic bulletin-bell method of "bringing urgent stories or alerts to the wire editor's screen no matter what is on the screen at the moment." And Jerry Finch of the Richmond (Va.) News Leader says while his engineers tell him you can't put a bell on their Atex system, they do use a system which flashes a "message pending" to a number of editors. When the editor calls up the message, "he or she is informed that Story No. XXX is a priority story (bulletin or flash)."

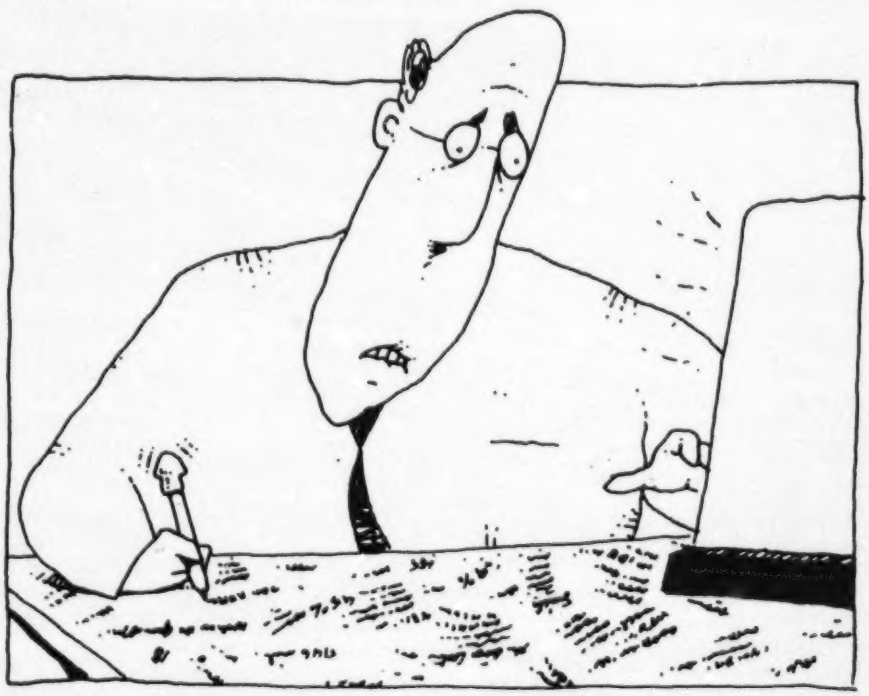
Wendell Givens of the Birmingham News says "Whenever a bulletin enters our system , a 'beep' and a message at the top of the VDT alerts the editor."

Rosemary Kovacs of The Plain Dealer says she has no alarm system, but she does have "a big klaxon horn to alert everyone when the system goes down."

And the Dallas Morning News' John Davenport says the "news editor reserves the right to ring the wire editor's bell if he misses a big story on deadline."

Opinions vary on electronics' effect

By Bob Nordyke
Lawrence Journal-World



What has the electronic world meant to news editors? How much has it changed their work, altered their sense of news?

A survey of editors of papers with less than 100,000 circulation found that most of the 82 responding believed that electronic gadgetry has changed their work, but of the 51 who said their work has changed, there's divided opinion on whether the changes have made their jobs easier or more difficult.

Generally, the findings match the results of a survey of editors at papers with circulations over 100,000. Most of the editors think that electronic gadgetry has made life easier and that the new equipment just gives them another set of tools that allows them to do their jobs better.

The editors generally said that the impact of the electronic era has been to change the ways their work is done, but hasn't changed the essence of the work itself.

Most editors responding to the survey (44) believe that television has had an impact on the job of the news editor. That impact, they said, has been to make editors more aware of the competition, more alert to fresh leads, more conscious of the need to serve readers with analysis and detail and more imaginative in the use of color, graphics and pictures.

Most editors (66 of those responding to the survey) don't think that TV has forced them to give undue play to off-beat stories. Many said giving play to "off-beat" stories (read that interesting stories) is nothing new and those stories should find their way on Page One if deserving.

Few editors have found themselves relegated to the role of engineer because of the varying number of columns on a page. Most editors (63) said that electronic equipment has made it easy to deal with the various column sizes, and, at worst, the variety in sizes is simply something of a minor nuisance to overcome.

Editors showed less agreement on whether they feel swamped by an increased load of copy from high-speed and supplemental wire services. Of those responding to the question, 31 said they felt swamped at times; and 45 said they weren't swamped and generally preferred the choice and variety offered by the increased amount of copy.

Better feast than famine, they said, and suggested that having more copy allows the news editor to do a better job of selecting and presenting the news to readers.

Few editors (6) felt they have much problem with AP copy getting to the right place. Sixty-nine of those responding said AP coding, individual computer systems and in-house referral systems generally ensure that copy gets to the right person or desk. A few noted problems — most termed minor — with AP codes not being consistent and stories not always showing up where expected.

Although several editors said their newsrooms aren't totally weaned from paper, most of the editors in no-paper newsroom operations said the lack of paper hasn't presented serious problems. Fifty-nine editors said the no-paper operation has worked well for them; only nine said they have some problems.

And, in case you're wondering (as many

editors apparently are) there are workable alarm / bell systems to alert editors to bulletins. The alert systems aren't always actual bells, they include systems that flash on VDTs to systems that activate printers. Still, many editors (50) said they don't have a workable bell system and would like better protection than a "silent" system that flashes on a screen.

"Yes, the job has changed," says Marx Gibson of the Kankakee (Ill.) Daily Journal. "The news editor's job is tougher now because of electronic gadgets. He or she has much more news to look at and judge than previously. We've gone back to the old-time desks — farm-rural news desk; business news desk; Sunday desk; wire desk; city desk; Page One desk . . . . Each desk is responsible for its wires and pages."

Bill Schultz of the Intelligencer Journal, Lancaster, Penn., also says the job is tougher. "It's harder to stay in control of the flow of copy," he said. "In theory, copy editing should be better because it's easier to make changes in a story, but I'm not convinced it has improved."

Although agreeing that the job has changed, Randy MacPherson of the Lima (Ohio) News thinks electronic equipment has eased the load. "I would say my job as news editor has been eased with the VDT," he said. "Copy is much easier to read and handle. I am able to make decisions faster, too. Our ability to judge the news has been enhanced, I think."

Dan Sabol of the Sacramento Union also says the news editor's work is eased with the help of electronic equipment. "I think the electronic newsroom has eased the news editor's job, enabling him to hold page 1 longer for later-breaking stories, taking stories inside at the last minute, changing sets or stories and enabling him to check more stories."

Gordon Mobley of the Columbia (S.C) Record notes another benefit. "Electronic gadgets have allowed the news editor to become a graphic designer, without sacrificing duties as an editor of copy and a news judge."

"VDTs and high-speed wires have helped," said Jenk Jones Jr. of the Tulsa Tribune. "News editors now can evaluate copy even as it is being edited elsewhere, and he has the capability to read vast amounts of wires."

"Of course VDTs have changed the nature of the news editor's job," said Joy Roper of the Corpus Christi Times. "But he / she is as vital as ever. At least here we are. We are still very much evaluators of news."

Tom Eblen of the Fort Scott (Kan.) Tribune agrees the job has changed, and notes, "The news editor who doesn't understand that part of his job includes 'filling space' cannot last. Of course, how he or she fills the space will determine product quality."

Kent Stubbings of the Topeka Capital-Journal has a different view. "With VDTs, I feel more removed from the news, and I feel I have less control over the newspaper's content. On local copy, the news editor does not see the lead of the story, and so becomes somewhat of a filler of space. The news editor is more dependent on the judgment of the city editor. This is not all bad. The city editor should be a good judge of news. The news editor can look at stories on the VDT, but due to our VDTs' slow response, this is not practical to do often."

Emmett Smelser of the Palladium-Item, Richmond, Ind., says it takes more time to call up a story on a terminal, edit and code the story. "And there's not been a compensatory increase in copy desk help. So editing may be less thoughtful," he said. "Also, there's a temptation to read less carefully, because, psychologically, all copy looks good on the tube."

Tom Mitchell of the Odessa (Tex.) American says the news editor's job in the electronic era hasn't significantly changed. "It has made it easier in that electronics do much more than a black pencil, but the news judgment area of the job is the same."

Rich Browne of the Texarkana Gazette answers both yes and no to the question of whether the news editor's job is changing. "Electronic news editors almost have to be system managers (have total understanding of all the functions of the computer system) if they are to operate effectively and supervise story selection well, but it should not diminish news judgment," Browne said.

Finally, Bill Gordon of the Pensacola News-Journal says, "VDTs or any other technical advance will not create a robot out of an editor. The technology is merely advanced to make the job easier and faster."

Although seen as the coming development in newsroom technology, few editors in the under-100,000 circulation survey have had much experience with pagination or much to say about how they expect pagination will change their newsroom operations.

One editor looking ahead to the days of pagination said he hoped it would give the news editor more control over the total news product. "I look forward to the move to pagination, with the hope that it will give the copy desk more complete control over the final product," said John Yenne of the El Paso Times.

One anonymous editor said that pagination will not diminish the news editor's task of being an astute judge of news, and will, if anything, give the news editor more control of layout and story play. The additional time needed to paginate, he said, will force some increased delegation of other chores.

Frank Williams of the Fort Myers News-Press says pagination is coming to his paper this fall, but was not certain of the effect on the news desk. Currently the paper has a desk that does layout for the metro desk as well as wire, Williams said.

Curt Babcock of the Albuquerque Journal says pagination is a few years away but he doesn't plan on twin desks. He says the paper plans to dummy on paper and let "composing room types make up electronic pages."

"We do not have pagination but are processing as much copy as possible in modular makeup blocks, particularly to save pasteup time and film consumption and particularly in preparation for the day of pagination," said Don Bartsch of the Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune. "When that comes, I can't see how the newsroom can avoid beefing up our copy editor staff. As it is now, VDTs cut into news editor's time drastically. One more chore and we'll need a twin-desk operation; one for judging the news and one for processing it."

And John Wolfe of the Knoxville Journal is facing the coming of pagination with some trepidation. "I've never worked with pagination, but, right now, it scares me to death," he said. "I see it really turning editors into technicians and I don't like that at all."

Will Corbin of the Escondido Times-Advocate said he expects pagination will simply complete the process of turning the old functions of composition over to the newsroom. "It is highly possible that pagination will mean a split desk (edit desk and layout desk), particularly on larger, highly specialized newspapers," he said. "That becomes a simple matter of the practicality of having every member of a desk proficient on two rather complex machines. To my knowledge, however, that situation exists already on larger newspapers. I would try to avoid such a split; judgment, packaging and headlines all relate, and having one editor responsible for both tends to keep pages tied together more cohesively."

Editors were almost equally divided on the question of whether TV news and the increase of cable newscasts has changed the job of the news editor, but few editors think that TV news has forced them to play up "off-beat" stories. Rather, they say those stories should be competing for good play as a matter of good news judgment.

"Of course TV news has had an impact on newspaper editors, says Will Corbin of the Escondido Times-Advocate. "The 'scoop' has become something of a dinosaur, particularly on those issues that TV covers — the loud breaking story or national-international news. We don't surprise anyone with a 72-point headline about war or assassination. We continue to have a certain sense of having to handle those stories in that way simply because that's what we've always done. Besides, we'd look silly if we didn't."

Corbin also says TV has forced papers to give play to some "off-beat" stories. "Why would anyone read us if all we have on our front pages is what they saw on the news last night? I certainly don't advocate making us all the National Enquirer or the New York Post, but off-beat (translate interesting) stories can attract readers."

Significant (translate boring) stories can turn them off, especially when they already saw the "significant" stuff on TV. "The worst thing we can do is allow our bloated sense of self-importance make us boring," Corbin said.

Rudy Hanner of the Ledger-Star of Norfolk, Va., said a news editor should watch

TV for comparison and ideas, but the paper primarily is concerned with in-depth coverage of good stories, both news and features. "News briefs, shorter stories and wider variety in coverage probably resulted from 24-hour TV news operations, but the paper still shoots for accurate and detailed coverage of the best stories that day," he said.

"Broadcast has changed the way we live," said Tom Curley of the Norwich (Conn.) Bulletin, "and it should have changed the way we edit. The news cycle has been shortened. We can't lead with an economic statistic out of Washington announced by 9 a.m. the day before publication. Broadcast has dramatized the news and increased interest in national and international news."

Soren Nielson of the Standard-Times in San Angelo, Tex., said TV hasn't had much impact on his news operation, "although we always monitor local TV news to gauge their judgment and enterprise."

Nielson also said he didn't think TV has forced undue play of off-beat stories. "We do not edit based on TV play or TV impact. A good story is still a good story," Nielson said.

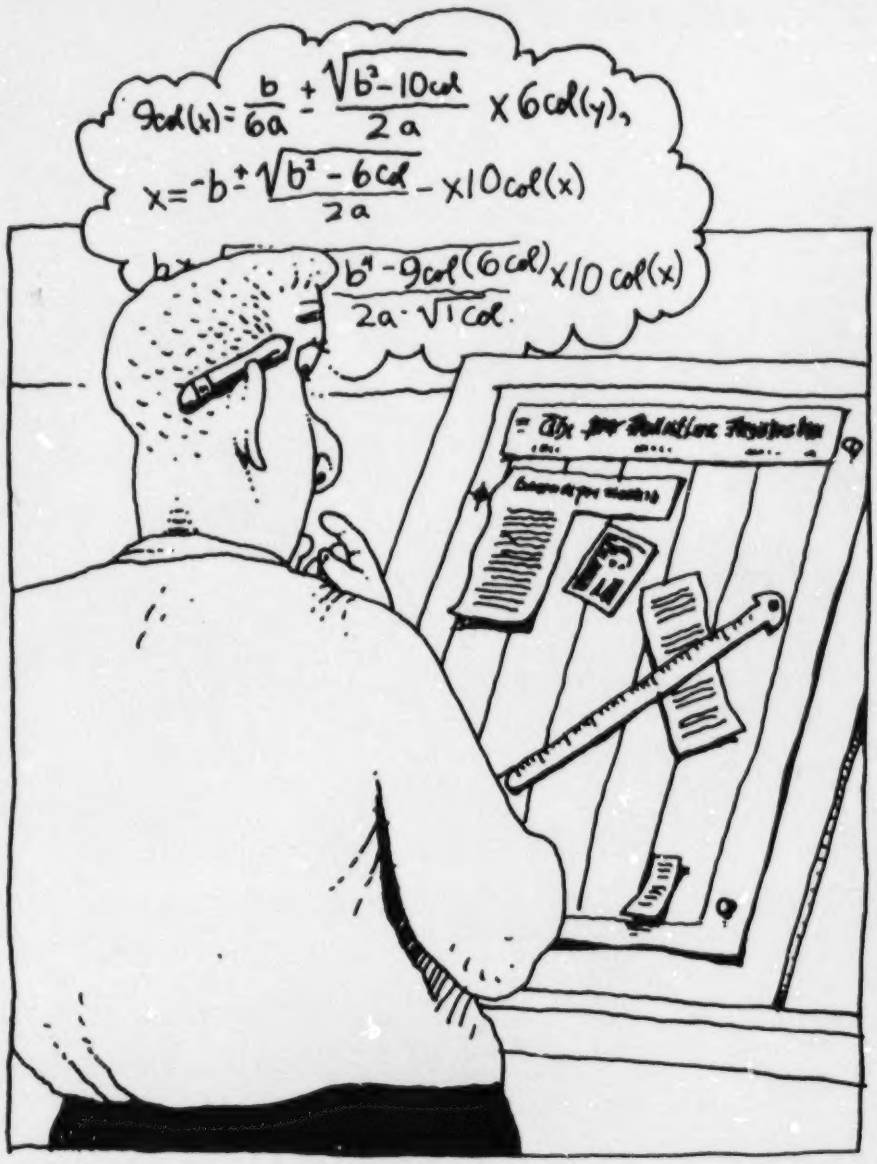
Jerry Ziegler of the Capital Times of Madison, Wis., however, said, "We're definitely playing off-beat stories more often and more prominently. We now often look for that one extra grabber story in the hope of catching some segment of the reading public, or compete better on the newsstands."

Kent Cockson of the Pensacola News-Journal said he thinks TV has probably had little impact on the news editor. "But it should work the other way. Since we're out of the running on being 'first' at spot news delivery, we've got to ensure that we're right and complete. And that means we'd better do a better, more thorough job in our AMs than what late night news offers, and better than what the noon report had in our PMs."

"TV news has caused us to be more aware of time elements (such as looking for second-day angles on stories such as a Reagan news conference held the night before)," said Curt Babcock of the Albuquerque Journal. But he said TV really has slight impact "other than to make us more aware of what the competition is doing. We still play what we believe is the most important news, even if we aren't the first to present it."

"The greatest effect of TV news, I think, has been to make us more aware of the importance of good graphics and other visual components of the news," said Grace Kutkus of the Post-Courier Newspapers of Charleston, S.C. "We try more than we used to to make the best use of color and to display graphics and photography to the best advantage. The idea is to help inform the readers as well as attract them to the newspaper. Our emphasis has remained on the significant stories."

And speaking of off-beat stories, Tom Eblen of the Fort Scott (Kan.) Tribune said more of those stories should be getting good play. "The news editor is competing for people's time. He or she better find interesting material to go with all that stuff we know is essential."



Although many editors say they have problems keeping up with the load of high-speed and supplemental wires, a higher number say the added materials is not burdensome and also results in a better news product.

The added copy "is tough on a small staff," said Mark Murphy of the Elmira Star-Gazette. "But I'd rather have as many options on a big story as I can have. So keep the copy coming."

"It's a race to keep up with the wires, and it definitely takes more editor-hours than in the past," said Charles Nutt of the Courier-News of Bridgewater, N.J. "That can lead to some hurried judgments at times, but in some other ways (getting an earlier look at major stories, not having to string together separate inserts and news leads) it has improved the editing process. Overall high speed is a plus," he said.

Mike Walter of The Post-Crescent, Appleton, Wis., said the high-speed copy isn't a problem. "Because it comes high-speed, we are given more time to look at and evaluate something, rather than await the slow-moving story, then react when it finally comes."

Gene Rogalski of the Anderson (S.C.) Independent-Mail, said the increased copy load "definitely limits time spent on reading copy. Makes us rely more heavily on budgets."

Jerry Ziegler of the Madison (Wis.) Capital Times is one editor who feels the crunch. "I have established an entire second-priority electronic directory for stories that appear, based on the leads, interesting but not necessarily top priority for the day. I generally shoot these stories into that di-

rectory early in the morning and try to get back to them to look at later in the day. But the mountain of copy seems endless."

Joe Duncan of the Huntsville Times sees a similar problem. "There is no way one person can give every story the evaluation it deserves. You usually find yourself depending on a certain reporter on a certain story, or a certain news service on a certain type story," he said.

And Don James of the Wichita Falls (Tex.) Times and Record News said the "wire services and supplemental services have been making many of our news play decisions for us because news editors rely on this assessment rather than carefully scanning everything that's offered. Now it's 'follow the budget' because of slowness of tubes."

Frank Williams of the Fort Myers News-Press has another opinion. "High-speed wires have indeed swamped us, but it's been a delightful swamping . . . . Of course, we're more apt to go with the straight AP and then go back between editions to pick and choose among the supplementals."

Nelson Lampe of the Hayward (Calif.) Daily Review said the added copy presents some problems, but he definitely prefers the choice offered. "It remains possible, if tougher," to keep up with the copy, he said. "But on the whole, I would think it would improve our judgments. After all, we now have something to choose from. The old UPI / AP coin toss is no way to run a newspaper either."

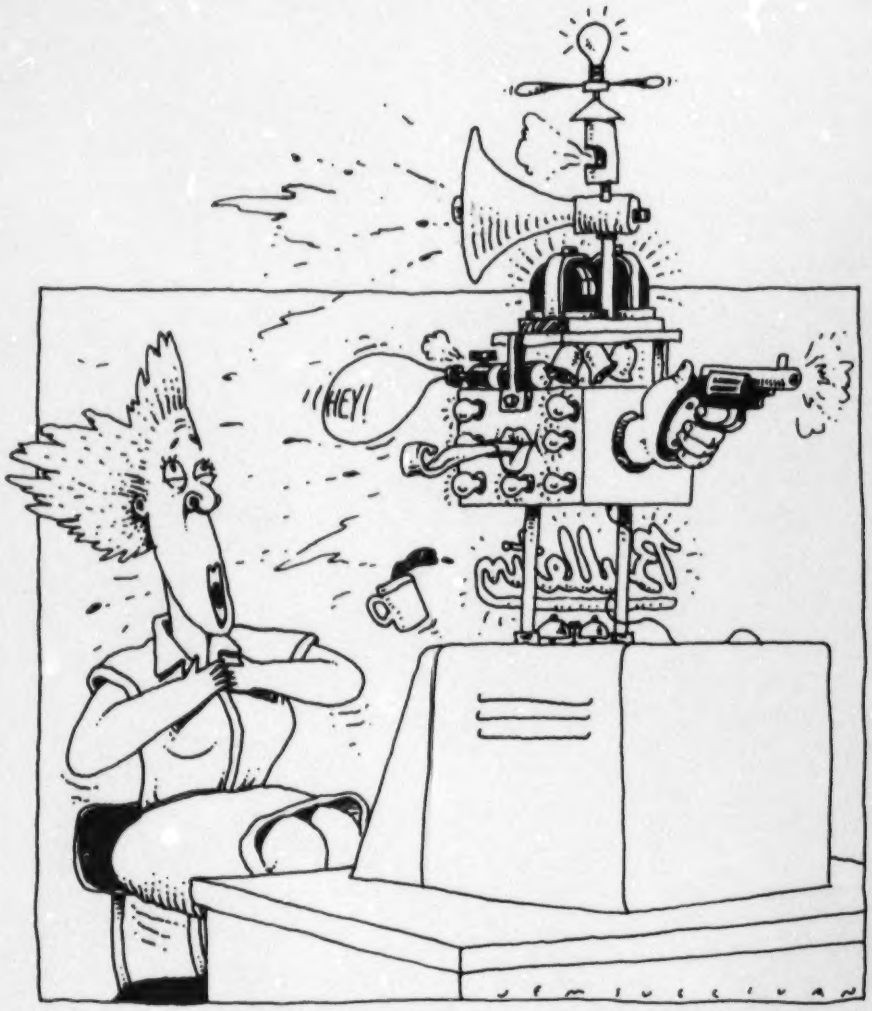
Another editor who prefers the choice is Ev Landers of the Nevada State Journal / Reno Evening Gazette. The added wire copy, she said, has "enlarged the number of choices and for the most part run to the benefit of the reader. When swamping takes place, it is usually because the desk is understaffed or ill-trained. If some . . . publishers would recognize the folly of running a desk into the ground every day, some of the problems cited would be solved."

Editors are almost unanimous in saying that wire copy is getting to the right people after it reaches their electronic systems.

It's a simple process, said Jenk Jones Jr. of the Tulsa Tribune. "Our system works well. We have a number of different desks (national, Washington, foreign, Oklahoma, business, entertainment, sports, etc.) into which wire files by code or dateline. Editors then move stories to anyone else who should read them; that process is simple."

"Our AP copy seems to get to the right department with little trouble," said Joe Worley of the Nashville Banner. "Some copy goes directly into specialized computer compartments, such as lifestyles, sports and state news. Stories which come into the main news compartment are directed to the proper department when the news editor does a scroll of the wires."

Don Bartsch of the Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune said, "In general, our AP copy is sorted well and quickly into various working directories. Have had a few coding problems to cause mis-sorting," he said.



"For the most part, copy is routed well, though occasionally it goes to the wrong file or to 'oddfile,'" said Steve Fox of the Scottsdale (Ariz.) Daily Progress. "Also, sometimes we will get a first writethru, followed by a third writethru, missing the second one."

Most editors say the no-paper desk presents no serious problems for them, although many aren't completely without paper support.

One editor full of praise for the no-paper system is Walter Julian of the Greenville (S.C.) News. "The no-paper desk is beautiful," he said. "There's less clutter and less waste. If we really need a hard copy of a story, we can print it out. Our referral system works — most of the time — sorting material among general national, Washington, international, political, sports, state / regional and syndicated indexes."

"When we eliminated paper, we improved everything on our desk," said Don James of the Wichita Falls Times and Record News. "Using VDTs without paper is vastly superior to editing from printouts or even story selection from printouts and editing by tube."

Joe Worley of the Nashville Banner said, "Not only is the no-paper wire desk not a problem, it is a blessing. Copy in the computer is much easier to manage than copy on several hundred scraps of paper. When hard copy is needed, a story can be printed out."

Another opinion comes from Lana Johnson of the Anchorage Times. "It's harder to edit without paper because it's hard to combine part of two versions of the same story," she said. "Other than that, the computer referral system we use is fine."

Steve Fox of the Scottsdale Daily Progress likes the no-paper system, but notes there can be problems. "I am happy not to have to work with tons of paper," he said. "When the system is feeding copy to the right files, the system works well. The only disadvantage is that computer malfunctions sometimes cause copy to be 'eaten,' or not received at all, in which case we must ask AP for re-runs."

Many editors, it seems, would like to return to the days of the bell that sounded the alarm for an urgent or bulletin. And while many computer systems offer methods of alerting editors to top stories, they don't have the feel of the old bells.

Jim Garrett of the News-Press of Santa

Barbara, Calif., said bulletins go to the news editor's and wire editors' queues, and it also activates a lineprinter in the newsroom.

Systems set up to activate lineprinters when bulletin stories arrive are in place at several papers.

For lack of a bell system, The Texarkana Gazette uses ANPA coding for bulletin / flash / urgent to direct those items directly to the news editor's work queue.

At the Danville (Ill.) Commercial-News, "We have come up with a system where we can alter the wireflow late in the morning from a copy editor's terminal. This allows us to queue all urgent stories to a special urgent queue and also prints out the story. The lineprinter is very close to us so we hear the printer when it turns on," said Ed Chambliss.

Mike Sweeney of the Stamford (Conn.) Advocate said he has no alarm bell but the computer system "does beep and flash a 'bulletin' when something happens out there."

And at the Memphis Press-Scimitar, a device has been added to their ATEX stystem that buzzes and turns on a light on the wire desk when a bulletin comes in. It also automatically activates a line printer.

Dora Ann Reaves of the Charleston (S.C.) Evening Post said her paper gets some extra help from the AP. " . . . The state AP still makes telephone calls on breaking stories rather than sending bulletin messages," she said.

A few kind words for the censors

By Hugh A. Mulligan
AP Special Correspondent

Perhaps after all there is something to be said for censorship. Not much, but something.

I can recall the censor sticking his head out of the little wire-up window in the Phnom-Penh P.T.T. (post and telegraph office) in Cambodia and carpingly crying out: "Which one is Murrigan? That's not the way to spell guerrilla — two l's, two r's, preeze."

But apropos of the painful subject at hand, it was an Israeli censor who caught me in the most immoderate modifier of three decades of keyboard miscarriages. The adjectival atrocity occurred toward the end of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, which I was assigned to cover from the Israeli side. An Israeli parachute battalion was trapped on the west or African side of the Suez Canal at the same time that the Egyptian Third Army was surrounded on the Israeli side of the canal in the vicinity of the Great Bitter Lake.

AP had won the press pool to cross the canal with Gen. Ariel Sharon's armored units, so I was in position to cover the denouement of these two military mishaps, both of which dragged on for several days before fizzling out with the ceasefire. One day I crossed back over the canal to the Israeli-occupied side and went to the town of El Arish for a sidebar. The desert sun must have been hot that day, as I found myself writing:

"The chief rabbi of Israel today offered special prayers for all Jewish soldiers cut off at the front."

That graceless gaucherie got by the busy AP desk in Tel Aviv, but fortunately Shylock the Censor was on the job with his big scissors, or perhaps Marvin the Mohel would be the more appropriated soubriquet.

He called up the AP bureau in paroxysms of unkind laughter, calling attention to this inadvertent anatomical gaffe, but at least rescued it from going out on our worldwide wires.

Ever since, I have been more circumspect, or something, about my copy.

I also once spelled Pontius Pilate as if he were on the flight deck for the ascension into heaven, but we won't go into that as there are still a few editors about with short fuses and long memories who never have forgiven me. Somehow, the Middle East is not my turf.

By the way, speaking of magnificent modifiers, Red Smith once described Renee Richards as "the bigget form reversal since SERUTAN."

Those awards have their limitations

By Larry Fortner
Duluth News-Tribune & Herald

I have a firm, if strictly personal, conviction that contests and awards play no role at all in developing good news writers.

Awards are wonderful for the ego; nothing is more satisfying to a newspaper person than recognition. Sometimes the awards are even kind to the pocketbook; recognition is especially nice when you can take it to the bank.

Awards are satisfying also for the keenly competitive among us, especially if the rivals for the prizes were those hacks at that rag across town.

But does the quest for official recognition, for money, for bragging rights really develop news writers? No.

Consider:

•In journalism, by the time a piece of prose has been deemed peerless it is old news. Often months will pass after the publication of a story before it is even entered in a contest. Weeks more will pass before judging is completed and the story is declared a winner. Only true devotees of award-winning news stories will take the time to read them after the fact.

•And how many award-winning stories are reprinted for national distribution? Few indeed. And how many reporters and copy editors in how many newsrooms actually read the few stories that are reprinted and distributed nationally? Not many. Award-winning copy can't help those who don't read it.

Development of good news writers begins right outside your office. Or, if you have the time, the energy, the respect of your reporters and a flair for teaching — right *inside* your office.

Assuming that you hire only those who have good news instincts and a proven gift with the language, you can help them develop as writers if:

•You lead by example with your own writing, whether in stories, columns or even memos to the staff.

•You insist on consistency in style and usage. The faithful use of two slim volumes — "The Elements of Style" and "On Writing Well" — can do nothing but help.

•You point out examples of excellence in other newspapers or magazines of recent vintage.

Thus my message:

Contests don't develop news writers. Editors and reporters working together develop news writers.

Not that I'm against contests. They're fun. Especially when you win 'em.

Obituaries are written for the living

By Bob Conley
Visalia (Calif.) Times-Delta

Readership surveys show that obituaries are among the best read items in our daily newspapers.

Should a friend or relative die, that is the most important news for you at the moment. It could also be the most important thing that happened in the neighborhood in a long time.

Yet, many newspapers delegate the writing of obituaries to clerks, young journalists or the mortuaries. Some publish only selected obituaries of prominent people, and some don't publish any unless they are purchased.

If they are so important to our readers, why do we many times feel they are unimportant? One of my first city editors used to give the obits to the new kids on the block so he could check our accuracy and clarity of writing style. But today many papers write the form obit with few chances for creativity.

At The Milwaukee Sentinel, the writing handbook reads:

"Like funerals, obituaries are for the living, not the dead. So give them life."

It then goes on to outline items that should be contained in obituaries from specific information that should be sought to style and the use of pictures.

In California at the San Bernardino Sun, the classified department handles all obituaries. They are paid for, but a run list of the names is sent to the newsroom each day so it can be checked for prominent persons.

City Editor Richard Brooks said that the procedure began in 1980 and there were few complaints, mostly from the mortuary owners. Now it is accepted, he said, and few people complain.

Many newspapers used to have senior reporters or editors on staff who wrote obituaries and knew almost everyone in town. Today many of the senior staffers likely will remind the clerk or person assigned obit writing that day that there should be a file in the paper's morgue on a specific individual.

If a movie star, politician or anyone in the news dies, most newspapers will carry the obituary. Depending on the time of death with the news cycle, the story will be generally on page 1A.

But if a 60-year resident of the community dies, it is stuffed into a neat package inside the paper labeled deaths. Often it will not get in unless it is paid for.

In the June issue of Washington Journalism Review, Nancy Doyle Palmer interviewed a number of editors about their paper's policy on obituaries. She wrote:

"We're democratic in death," says the Washington Post obituary editor, J.Y. Smith. "We've never killed one off a budget." The Post's obituary policy guarantees a news-style story for any local, private citizen when a request for one is made. It is one of the few major papers in the country to do so.

"The opposite extreme to the Post's generous obituary policy is that of the New York Times. The Times' metropolitan news editor, Peter Millones, calls the Post policy "crazy" and says, "I don't understand that; it doesn't make any sense to me. That's treating obituaries as if they weren't news . . . . They are news and that's why we're printing them."

(The Times will publish an obituary on notables only.)

At a mid-sized paper like the Evening Press and Sun-Bulletin in Binghampton, N.Y., circulation about 10,000, newsworthiness remains the standard for obituaries, but what qualifies as newsworthy differs from the metropolitan dailies. Managing Editor David Mack, who calls the Press a "home town paper," reports that service to the community by obituaries matters a great deal. Mack cites one recent obit on a mid-level businessman who got a write-up

because he had coached the local high school team during its glory years two decades before.

And in the small resort town of Charlevoix, Mich., you don't even have to have lived there to get your obit in the weekly Charlevoix Courier, circulation 3,700.

There are as many different ways to write obituaries as there are to get them into the paper.

One of the best guides that is concise and could be used by a clerk, journalist or mortician is the one from The Sentinel. With a few minor changes it could be adapted to almost any paper's writing manual.

But as we move into the world of forms and computers, we must keep in mind the line, " . . . obituaries are for the living . . . ."

A sample guide to obituary writing

From The Milwaukee Sentinel Stylebook

Like funerals, obituaries are for the living, not the dead. So give them life.

Readership surveys show that obits are among the best read parts of any newspaper. Don't be misled that they are unimportant because new reporters frequently are assigned to them. That is because they follow a pattern, are nearly always gathered by telephone by reporters working under close supervision, and are an excellent test of accuracy, the reporter's best friend. In no copy are errors more conspicuous than in obits!

Give obits life, we said. That means find the important angle, the human touch, the distinguishing facts about a person who has died (we always say "died," not "passed on" or "gone to his reward" or some such dodge). Is she the schoolteacher who was the first to use a rubber hose instead of a ruler? Did Dr. Jones cut out President Coolidge's tongue?

Certain information shows up in every obit. Get:

•Complete name. Do not use "Mr." before surnames.

•Age (expressed in figures set off by commas, not "at age of . . . ").

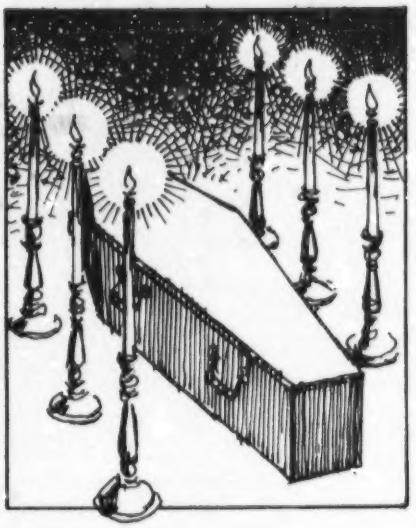
•Address (identify suburb if the dead one lived in one).

•Occupation and career history. (Keep alert here. This may give you the facts for a good obit instead of an ordinary one.)

•When died.

•Cause of death. (This is a must in all obits. Say died of, not from.)

•Survivors. (Wife, children, parents, sisters, brothers, period.)



•Civic activities. (Keep alert here, too.)

•Unusual incidents of life. (A pioneer? A millionaire? A champion goldfish swallower?)

•Education, with degrees and dates.

•War record, if worth it.

•Funeral arrangements.

How do we find obits? The system works this way around here: The city desk will pass on to the reporter clips of obits from The Sentinel and Journal. In addition, the classified death notices from the papers will be given to the reporter. So will the typed notices from classified advertising. Watch any that are circled or marked and give these a close check. Check any others that have important names or good addresses.

In addition, we write all obits that are offered to us. **But always check out facts with the family, even if they come from the funeral home.**

If the person is widely known, write a complete obit. If not, keep it to the point. Some tips on obits:

•There should be at least one out of the ordinary fact about each person and get that in the lead.

Check library clips, the family, business associates and Who's Who on your subject.

•Mrs. John Anderson died. But get her maiden name, Mary Smith, into the obit.

•We don't write obits on persons under 21 years unless they were widely known or there are other unusual circumstances. Ask.

•A wife, not a widow, survives. Use her first name.

•It's a body that's left. And a body is sent, not shipped like iced fish. It is not "in state."

•Get pictures of the better obits — for all you write, if possible. Our usual plan is to pick up pictures by cab if none is in our library.

•Notify the picture desk that the picture is coming.

•While obits should be lively, use good taste.

•Suicides — discuss with city editor.

•We use burial details.

•With a heart attack, or other usually sudden affliction, we ought to say whether the attack was (a) some time previously and had resulted in hospitalization; (b) suffered at home, in church or saloon or wherever, and the patient was taken to the hospital where he died. Any reader interested in the obit would want to know.

The rewrite bank is not dead — yet

By Thomas B. Debley
Hayward (Calif) Daily Review

You wouldn't call a woman who answers the newsroom phone "Sweetheart" any more. And chances are she wouldn't know what you were talking about if you barked, "Gimme rewrite!"

"The rewrite man is kind of fading out of the trade," Hugh Hough, the Pulitzer Prize-winning veteran of 25 years on rewrite at the Chicago Sun-Times, says. "It's progress, I guess."

But rewrite is not dead — yet. Maybe it won't die. While the rewrite bank has been abolished at many newspapers — perhaps most recently at the Denver Post — many editors want some form of rewrite and the disappearing deadline writer to survive. Others believe it's time to let the rewrite bank join the Linotype.

Interviews of editors at nine major daily newspapers found some agreement on one point: Fast, accurate deadline writers who can produce high-quality stories are hard to find.

"Those are rare birds," Bill Evans, associate managing editor of the Dallas Morning News, says.

"There isn't any doubt about that," adds Michael Waller, Kansas City Times managing editor. "That skill is not extinct, but it is disappearing."

"I think it is a lost art," says Seattle Times Managing Editor Michael R. Francher. "There's a lot of reasons it should be brought back."

Several editors see reasons to retain a restricted form of rewrite, generally limited to significant breaking stories and special projects that lend themselves to a single writer's pulling together of information from other reporters serving as legmen.

No one wants to go back to the days when reporters did nothing but feed notes to rewrite, although the practice thrives on

Fast, accurate deadline writers

Fast, accurate deadline writers . . . are rare birds

some Sun-Times beats, and Los Angeles Times senior assistant metropolitan editor David Rosensweig says he feels sentimental thinking about the possible extinction of the rewrite man.

Most of the editors emphatically agree journalism schools are not producing good deadline writers. "Oh, no way," Rosensweig says. "That I can say with confidence!"

• • •

Rewrite practices range from adaptation of the Chicago-style rewrite bank to the electronic age at the Sun-Times to the Denver Post's abolition of rewrite.

Five rewrite people work the day shift, with two on duty at night, to meet the round-the-clock deadlines of the Sun-Times. Kenneth D. Towers, assistant managing editor for news, says it makes sense to use a rewrite bank. No thought has been given to eliminating it. In fact, reporters in the police and criminal court bureaus are being given portable terminals. They type notes on the tube and transmit them to rewrite. In addition to preparing breaking stories with use of rewrite, teams of reporters working on special projects feed information to the rewrite desk.

The bottom line at the Sun-Times is the rewrite bank survives because it gets the job done — sometimes in superb form. Hough, while watching rewrite disappear elsewhere, shared the Pulitzer for his rewrite work and original reporting on the 1974 slaying of Valerie Percy. "It's been kind of a tradition here," he says of his trade. "It still seems to work at the Sun-Times."

In the likewise competitive Denver market, however, neither the Post nor the Rocky Mountain News has a rewrite desk. The Post eliminated it. The News never had one.

Chuck Green, assistant managing editor for regional and local news at the 250,000-circulation afternoon Post, says rewrite outlived its usefulness. Good reporters and the speed afforded by technology, in part, eliminated the need. "We didn't think it made sense to pay two people for the work one person can do."

The money saved by eliminating four rewrite slots — $31,304 a year for each journeyman — resulted in an increase in the size of the reporting staff.

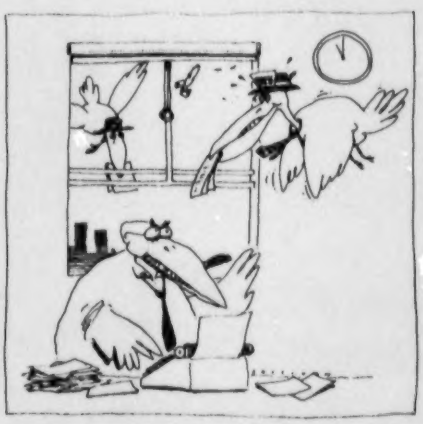
But Assistant Managing Editor Al Knight at the 300,000-circulation morning News would like to have a rewrite man, perhaps not so much to handle breaking stories regularly as to redo otherwise unusable stories on deadline. Like many other editors, he complains about a shortage of good deadline writers and too frequent a need to rework reporters' stories.

"Rewrite here is done in one of two ways," he explains. "We either send it back to the reporter or the reporter sits at the elbow of an assistant city editor, who massages the copy."

Knight thinks it might prove difficult to institute rewrite in a newsroom where it hasn't existed. He wonders whether he'd have to make the job a management position. Perhaps an assistant city editor? Or would the rewrite person become the pariah of the newsroom? Could he find a grandfatherly type everyone would love? Knight's conclusion: "There are a lot of problems with it."

The issue of a reporter's ego is real, but San Francisco Chronicle City Editor Jerry Burns worries about it only to a point. "There are fewer people who are willing to subordinate their own egos," he explains. "I don't blame them, but our duty is to our readers, and egos are way down the line."

At the Chronicle, rewrite is a daily occurrence, but the method falls between the old rewrite bank and no rewrite desk. On a breaking story, a reporter is assigned at the outset to write it. Other reporters are sent into the field to gather information. Egos are indeed subordinated. Science writer



Egos are indeed subordinated

Rewrite and deadline writers ... an endangered species

David Perlman, for example, wrote the paper's lead story on the Coalinga, Calif., earthquake of May 2, 1983, but the joint byline went to the legmen, reporters Gary E. Swan and Stephen Magagnini.

The system grew out of one Burns remembers when he went to work for the Chronicle 20 years ago. As a legman, he fed material to half a dozen staff members who wrote virtually all of the newspaper's stories. The six were nicknamed the "Stable of Stars" by those on the outside wanting in, Burns recalls. Today there's no exlusive club of writers.

The method is not restricted to the Chronicle. When Mount St. Helens exploded on May 18, 1980, the Seattle Times — which had no rewrite desk — dispatched reporters and gave one of the fastest writers, Rich Zahler, the job of putting the stories together. Zahler, who won an American Society of Newspaper Editors award for deadline writing, is now assistant city editor for special projects. For major breaking stories or special reports involving a team of reporters, Zahler coordinates coverage, with a lead reporter assigned to do the writing.

Francher is pleased with the results. He finds the egos of the non-writing reporters don't get bruised so long as the final story is well done. "It's been very effective. It works as long as the quality of what comes out is high."

Other papers use a combination of rewrite by assistant city editors and an occasional breaking story written by a lead reporter from notes fed by reporters in the field. The L.A. Times uses a rewrite system tailored to particular circumstances. Rosensweig said four regular staffers are used at night for rewrite because early deadlines combine with the difficulty reporters have getting back to the office on late-breaking stories in a city the size of Los Angeles. It's more efficient for them to feed the story to someone in the office.

While the diversity of approaches indicates the rewrite bank doesn't appear destined to come back en masse, editors clearly are interested in quality deadline writing. No matter what system they use to handle rewrite or deadline stories, they generally agree good deadline writers are difficult to find. But there's a shortage of ideas on how to develop what most editors view as a dying art.

"You get more and more people who want to be feature writers," the Chronicle's Burns says. "They think you have to take a lot of time to make a story good. I think it's all the result of the 'New Journalism.' "

"We have some young reporters who are very good at rewrite," says Rosensweig. "My reaction was: Golly, what a surprise."

No one sees college training as the answer. Wahler says journalism schools need to improve the teaching of such basics as accuracy, language usage and grammar before turning to writing speed. "You can do it fast, but if it's not accurate, it isn't worth a damn," he says. Denver's Knight puts it more bluntly, complaining about recent graduates who can't organize the facts in a story. "They just sort of spread them around like corn before the swine and expect people to wade through it."

Nor did some editors see training their reporters in the newsroom as that productive. "That's one of the real puzzles," Knight says. "They say it's been done. I've never been in a room where it's been done." Adds the Post's Green: "We can't afford on-the-job training."

The answer then? Experience. That's what most editors fall back on in recommending what to look for in the search for a good deadline writer. Look for a seasoned general assignment reporter who has covered a variety of stories under varying conditions. The man who would have to find a quality deadline writer if he lost someone on the rewrite bank is Towers at the Sun-Times. He says he would not consider a reporter who had specialized. He would seek someone with at last five years of solid general assignment experience.

As an editor who believes the rewrite desk can fade into history, at least at his paper, the Post's Green would agree. He feels he has created a staff of strong deadline writers through hiring practices that helped eliminate the need for the rewrite desk.

He brushes aside complaints that there is a shortage of such reportorial talent. It's a matter of searching for talented reporters through careful hiring. "They're not hiring the right people," Green says of papers with complaints about writing quality. "That's a reflection of hiring policies . . . . I've had no problems at all. I've had no complaints about the last seven to 10 reporters I've hired in the past three or four years. Their stories sing."

Seattle's Francher agrees. He and Green use similar hiring techniques. They seek strong candidates, preferably mid-career level in experience. They screen clips thoroughly, demanding samples covering a span of several years to eliminate the weak writer whose good stories were the result of an editor's rewrite.

Francher also gives the clips to his best writers for review and recommendation. He additionally relies heavily on the face-to-face interview. "As editors, we have all made bad writers look better, but in face-to-face interviews it comes through." Finally, Francher says he thoroughly checks references.

Hough, meanwhile, sums up his how-to tips on deadline writing: "Try to keep it simple. Keep your sentences reasonably short. It will just sort of work itself out."

As for the future, who knows? Maybe rewrite will make a comeback. But it's hard to imagine anyone barking, "Logon, VDT! Gimme a file!"

Sports columnists offer chuckles

By Fred Russell
Nashville Banner

I figure that I've written about 18,000 sports columns in the 51 years that I've been on the Nashville Banner and I've never done a column that I didn't think couldn't have been done better.

To surpass others is a common aspiration among human beings. To surpass ourselves is even better. Sports offers such opportunity in every phase of competition, and a lot of it rubs off on sports writers.

In this day and time, I think most newspaper publishers would prefer a sports columnist whose empathy and light touch provide a few chuckles more than the guarantee of five news scoops a month.

The value of one's talent to perceive what's funny is evidenced by the noticeable, ever-broadening effort by TV's sportscasters and commentators to convey a feel for humor.

Sports columnists are in a position to establish a continuing reliability for their opinions and interpretations. Their main role, though, is to inform and entertain. I believe that most people who turn to the sports pages first do so because there is so little fun anywhere else in the paper. To try to meet this need, sports writers do not have to contrive humor; they can manage very well if they only put in print a good selection of the funny things they see and hear.

Timing, of course, is everything in writing a column. On the day before the Super Bowl I wouldn't hardly speculate on the US Davis Cup tennis prospects or argue either way about baseball's reserve clause. And if tonight somebody tells me a good horse racing anecdote, I would be inclined to save it, of course, until the week of the Kentucky Derby. Everything a columnist sees or hears, thinks about, anything that happens to him, is possible material for a column. I've been both helped and bedeviled by a wide choice of subjects, and even when the general subject is settled beyond any question, such as the outcome of the Master's Tournament or a World Series, there is always that decision as to the best approach in doing a column and to stay away from, if you have another staffer covering the event, to stay out of his way and avoid duplication. I really have most of my trouble with the first line and the first paragraph of the column. Once I'm satisfied that the first half-page is all right the rest seems to come easier.

I want to tell you a true story. It's not about a column but about when I was selling some magazine pieces to the Saturday Evening Post back between 1949 and 1963. A lot of times I would try to work one semi-colon into the first paragraph. Somehow I thought it impressed the editors that I sort of knew what I was doing. One year I crowded a semi-colon and a colon and a dash into the lead paragraph of the annual football forecast that I used to do, "Pigskin Preview." And in just about three days I got in the mail three separate remonstrances, one from Bob Fuoss, who below his signature typed "semi-colon editor," Marty Sommers under his name, "Colon Editor," and Harry Paxton, "Dash Editor." That ended my one conscious effort to give any particular technical style to my writing.

My first principle is to try to make a column that's interesting to me. I don't know of anything more poisonous than self-boredom and I try to express my own emotion and thoughts. When I wrote about something I've seen or heard I try to interest and inform the person I would be if I had not been present. I try to shift out of the newspaper business and put myself in the world of a reader. That's the way I approach it.

I think one of the most important qualities a columnist can possess is empathy, the ability to get inside another person and see things through his eyes. In this manner the columnist can keep in mind how he might feel and what he might do in another person's shoes in controversial situations. I believe that to earn the right and the privilege to write a newspaper column, first of all the writer has to try to be fair.

One of the best pieces of advice that I ever received was from a young editor of the Banner real early in the 1930s, Mr. Willard Teague. I was real new on the paper, went there in '29, and he said, "Writing is an act of faith, not a trick of grammar. In developing a style of writing a column, the first thing is character. It's not easy to fool the reader." Mr. Teague was a believer in a writer using his eyes and his ears to observe, listen, think, read, read, read, then read some more.

For what you might call form or fashion, I think that a sports columnist can take lessons from some of the games he follows so closely. You've seen a lot of baseball pitchers who may have a lot on their fast ball, but if they throw that same pitch all the time, the batter's going to know what to expect and this very sameness will beat him. And to win the pitcher mixes his fast ball with curves and sliders and a change of pace. So should the columnists when throwing words and sentences and hoping to be read regularly.

You know, there are words that dance and phrases that should be wallflowers because of their overuse. Some words are just spongy with flavor and I envy the writers who are blessed with the knack of coming up with them. I recall a Jimmy Cannon line. "Beer drinkers lead a dreary and gaseous existence." Tells you a lot right there. And there was a baseball writer and columnist, Gary Schumacher, who was very descriptive. He wrote, "The state of Florida is shaped like an umpire's thumb."

There are words that have the true texture, and smell, and color, taste and sound. The late Ed Danforth, when he was an Atlanta sports columnist, exhibited his way with words when he captured some assorted memories. And I saved the piece he did then. Such expressions in it as "tall pines rolling with the punch of a storm," "a watermelon heart — cold," "a fieldhand singing wordless blues as he rides the mule toward the barn at night," "the whine of a spinning saw as it bites into an oak log," "frogs playing saxophones at sunrise," "a slim silver moon guarded by a single star."

I think the most skillful writing is that which provides the fullest or most graphic picture in the fewest words. One of the gems I recall was in a New Yorker magazine a few years ago, just four words, a characterization of a large group of Elvis Presley followers as "young, loud, soiled, incoherent."

One of the most valuable opinions I think I ever read on the nature and beauty of brevity was written many years ago by William Strunk Jr., then professor of English at Cornell. He wrote, "A paragraph should contain no unnecessary words, no unnecessary sentences for the same reason that a machine should have no unnecessary parts."

Actually, lack of brevity and lack of clarity are really discourtesies to the readers. The object of any piece of writing is to make the reader understand exactly what you have to say. And it's bad manners to cause them needless trouble. The fastest columns I do and the easiest to write are conversation pieces. This used to be a pleasure I looked forward to in the old days of baseball and Southern League ball, and it's true in spring training. I used to go out to the ballpark an hour and a half early and down to the bench. Ballplayers would get in the groove of cooperating with you. They knew what you were doing. One or two, like Johnny Mihalic, was great on this, and lots of times you could just start a conversation and bounce it around from one subject to another and get it in your mind so you could go to the press box and write the column in 20 or 25 minutes.

I think you have to cultivate an ear for recreating conversation on paper because for some people who are being interviewed, seeing a pencil and notepad will make them less expressive. And it's better to try to remember exactly what they say and make notes of what they say just as soon as you are alone, especially if you're interviewing just one person.

When you're doing columns from special events, of course, you become accustomed to writing in a press box. No matter how noisy or how crowded it is, you are geared to interruptions. I'm sure each writer has his own notion of what is a vexatious distraction.

For a young writer, home isn't necessarily the ideal place to try and do a column. I remember 35 years ago when I was doing a book of sports humor and our four daughters were very young and very lively. I dedicated that book to them with this line "To

Kay, Ellen, Lee and Carolyn, who made this book practically impossible."

I've never learned the touch system of typing. I guess the main reason is that with the two-finger method I can still type faster than I can think. It wouldn't help me any to be fast. A column of 800-900 words usually takes me about two hours to write. The fastest writer I ever saw worked in Knoxville, Tenn., the late Tom Anderson at The Knoxville Journal. I've seen him knock out pieces in seven or eight minutes, just nothing to it.

I try to write some columns in advance. There's a minimum risk that they will perish on you or go stale. The best chance to do that is always in baseball spring training, usually on cold, rainy days. There was a certain prolific Detroit columnist who told me one day he was 11 days ahead in his columns and I thought that was taking a big chance. Suppose he died suddenly and got stuck with them! Sometimes I get to thinking newspaper columnists might be smart to get switched around sort of like Methodist preachers do, in a new locality, before a new congregation. The columnist could use a lot of his old texts for a new audience.

Of course, there's pain and some agony in writing a new column every day or even three or four a week. I guess a blank page in a typewriter never ceases to be a frightening thing. A frantic Southern sports columnist years ago had labored three or four hours without success and it was about 10 minutes before the deadline. In desperation, he grabbed his scissors and he snatched an out-of-town sports section. It happened to be the Atlanta Constitution. He clipped from it hurriedly and pasted and clipped on a piece of copy paper, under a quickly typed sentence that read "I wonder what Ralph McGill means by this?"

In my opinion the best newspaper and sports columnist was Red Smith, at the New York Times. He was with the Herald Tribune and Philadelphia Record for many years. I thought the Herald Tribune, when Stanley Woodward was the sports writer back in the '40s, had the best sports staff that has ever been on a paper in the US. But Red had that special propensity for fresh active verbs and agreeable nouns. The consistent quality of his columns was attributed to his absolute clarity, his literate style, his wry humor.

It was an earlier sports writer who became a famous columnist outside of sports, Westbrook Pegler, who once wrote, "In a given number of turns at bat, a columnist must have those days when he is a wooden Indian, never getting his bat off his shoulder, or those days when he grounds out

Fred Russell

miserably to the pitcher, or pops a high foul. He's going to have those days." But Red Smith never seemed to have those days. He had consistent quality.

It was really true that Smith actually wormed his way into sports writing. He was fresh out of Notre Dame in 1928, working on a copy desk at the old St. Louis Star when a managing editor there assigned him to cover a night football game, which was a novelty back then. And Red wrote his story from the point of view of a glow-worm on the field — a glow-worm that was indignant about the floodlights!

Red was a great writer who just happened to like sports. He was a rare figure. He never stopped belonging to the present. But whether you're writing sports today or 25 years ago or 50 years ago, there are three requirements you have to have — accuracy, speed and sparkle.

No doubt columnists are in a position to establish a sort of continuing reliability for their opinion and their interpretations. If they're not reliable, you're going to hear from it right quick. You'd better be thick-skinned, and be able to take it, because you're going to get all kinds of letters in addition to personal confrontations.

I have to believe that most readers prefer the light touch, whenever that's possible.

Even in this day, I think lots and lots of newspaper readers may prefer the columnist who can provide a few chuckles more than one who has a daily compulsion for controversy. I'm prejudiced but I make a claim that sports and sports writing offer a person perhaps the highest grade happiness on the most convenient terms anywhere.

I feel the sports writer or the columnist with the best chance to succeed is one who has not only "backbone" and a "wishbone" but also is blessed with a "funny bone." Just a smidgen of humor helps a lot and I have the greatest admiration for the writer who can come up with a little laughter that cheers the soul. I look on laughter as the lubrication of the human spirit. There are some columnists who have a knack for leaving their readers each day smiling, but witty or humorous bottom lines are hard to come by.

The adversary role is useful for sports columnists just as it is for drama or music critics, but I do not regard it as an absolute daily necessity, which it in some places seems to be.

The man I regard as the No. 1 sports writer of all time rarely used the adversary role. I refer to a native Tennessean, Grantland Rice, who came along in 1901, and without any question he was the North Star by which a generation of sports writers set their course. And it can be said in truth that he was as much a poet as a writer. He could put his soul into verse.

Rice worked first in Nashville, then Atlanta, and from about 1911 into the 1940s writing out of New York City, he was the most successful syndicated columnist of his time. He was the leading stylist for many years and if you read some of his columns written 50 or 60 years ago, they touch on the classical. He gave sports writing glamour and romance.

But even greater than Grantland Rice's talent was his heart and his natural courtesy and his all-embracing kindness. He might be outdated right now because he looked upon great sports events as man at grips with fate. He stressed the nobility of gracious losing, and it may sound corny today, but I have to believe he wielded the widest influence for fair play of any person the sports world has ever known.

When I went to work for The Banner in the summer of 1929, my first assignment was the police beat. After about three months there, I had a wonderful surprise — I got moved into the sports department. And getting just that very first taste of sports writing, I loved it so much that I said to myself, right then: I said "I don't want to become the best sports writer, I just want to become the oldest one."

'Word' called useful, not panacea

By Dr. John H. Fisher
University of Tennessee

Rene J. Cappon, "The Word: An Associated Press Guide to Good News Writing," New York: The Associated Press, 1982. 140 pages.

"The Word" is a witty and sensitive compendium of dos and don'ts for editing expository prose. It deals with the problems that give the composition teacher the most trouble — mechanical errors are so much easier to deal with than style. Younger colleagues to whom I showed the book were delighted, as I was, by the coverage, but they were somewhat startled by its section headings. In English departments, we treat our subject with more reverence. Perhaps we would be more effective if we could be more lighthearted. My favorite Capponism comes in the lead into "Subjunctivitis": "Writers sometimes tense up over things that haven't happened, though they have, and flee into the woulds" (p. 121). The matters discussed are pretty much those in the standard handbooks, but the manner sets them apart.

As every teacher knows, examples make or break a lesson. Rene Cappon's are splendid, obviously the fruit of years of collecting. Each poor usage is immediately followed with a better. There should be a law against a teacher's marking a sentence "K" or with a handbook number. This usually leaves the novice writer in a quandary. I try to find better words, but if I had the 75-100 papers a week my younger colleagues do, I probably couldn't do it. It just takes too much time.

The good advice in Chapters 1 and 2 about making the sentences "lean and clean," with personal expression, active voice, and familiar vocabulary is unobjectionable, but it misses the reason for the obfuscation in much writing. This obfuscation is "committee style," adopted unconsciously — sometimes quite consciously "to protect any individual from taking responsibility for what is being written. This doesn't mean that vague language shouldn't be censured, but not even a great editor can turn marsh to marble. Criticizing the expression is often railing against a symptom rather than the cause.

Since some literary critics now appear to feel that objective analysis is psychologically impossible, I was particularly pleased with Chapters 5 and 6 on loaded words and the responsible use of quotations. The notion that all we can write out of is our prejudice sometimes seems to discourage writers from exploring other points of view. Objective statement still seems to me desirable, and I found it reassuring to read cautions about using words like "reform" and "assert," and about tampering with material within quotation marks.

The lists of elegant variations (p. 29), loaded words (p. 65), and cliches (p. 97), and the final "Bestiary" of particularly objectionable usages (Chapter 11) are marvelous mirrors in which to contemplate one's own shortcomings. Only an editor with impeccable taste and years of experience could have put such lists together. As Cappon says, Standard English is not rigid, and careful users of the language often disagree on particular locutions. The greater the pleasure in finding how seldom I disagreed with Cappon's judgment. On p. 33 his revision seems to me less effective than the original:

Original:

They said there would be no cortege. They were wrong. On every road and bridge that bore his name or imprint, there was an endless stream of cars and vans and trucks and buses.

Revision:

They said there would be no cortege. They were wrong. Cars and vans and trucks and buses, an endless stream, rolled over every road and bridge that bore his name.

The shift of subject from "they" to "cars" and the parenthetical "an endless stream" aren't nearly as smooth as the more natural original. There are a couple of other places where I would rewrite the revision, but given the nature of the material, the mastery of prose style is remarkable. It exemplifies what it advocates.

This is a handbook on rewriting, and since every writer must be his own first editor, useful to any writer. But it largely skirts the stage of composition, which is the real agony of writing. I sometimes think that this stage can't be taught. The good students arrive with it and can be helped with a hint here or there; the ones we labor over most never achieve it. In Chapter 7 on "Specific Detail" and Chapter 9 on "Features," Cappon touches on different styles and treatments that characterize different kinds of writing. But on the whole, there is little recognition of different situations and different registers in this book. Writing is treated as a compliant tool, and the writer / editor is instructed how to make the sentences smoother and more lucid no matter whether they advocate order or anarchy. Content is not the editor's business; his business is expression. This is, of course, an indispensable stage in the publishing process. Where would Thomas Wolfe be without his Maxwell Perkins? No one is more valuable than the accomplished copy editor.

But where the English department parts company with "The Word" is that we insist on worrying about the "value" of what is being said, and we tend to get hung up on concepts like "evidence" and "truth" and "metaphor." We are concerned with "the word" as conception as much as — perhaps more than — expression. Journalists worry about this deeper level of meaning, too, of course. It is no criticism of the Associated Press's excellent handbook to observe that it has little to offer about "composition" since that is not its purpose. It is a splendid manual for the editor, and for the writer at the stage of editing his own work, but it will not serve the writer in the gestative stage. Probably no handbook helps then, but only the classics themselves — Shakespeare or Locke or Matthew Arnold. Nor will it serve the poor composition teacher, who continues to worry about the student's "mind." "The Word" is a useful, delightful tonic, but not a panacea.

'The Word,' a drama in one act

By James A. Crook
University of Tennessee

THE WORD

Scene I — lunchroom next door to a daily newspaper

Scene II — newsroom

Cast of characters

Veterana Smith, copy desk chief

B. Young Jones, recent J-school grad

Prof. Copious W. Bernstein, author and writing coach

LaRue, waitress

Plot

An episode in which Jones receives "The Word" from Smith and contemplates his career over coffee with his friend and mentor Bernstein from the local university.

JONES: LaRue, my eyes are aching from writing overtime at my VDT.

LaRUE: (Dropping two packets of sugar substitute beside his coffee mug) You must be one of those workaholics I hear the bankers talk about at lunch hour.

JONES: I think I may be one, but I can't use that word.

LaRUE: Is it cussing or one of those double-meaning words?

JONES: No. (He laughs.) It's just on a list of "thou shalt nots" in my little brown book. (She leaves without understanding as Young spots a favorite professor enter the lunch room. He signals a vacant stool and the professor joins him.)

PROF.: Say, I'm going to be seeing a lot of you in the next few months, Jones. Your editor has asked me to meet informally with the staff to give them more feedback on their writing and editing. (He can see Jones wince.) No need to worry, Jones, you did fine work for me in Expository Writing last year.

JONES: (Remembering.) Yeah, that was one of my favorite classes.

PROF.: I'm looking forward to getting to know your colleagues at the newspaper.

LaRUE: Who's your friend? (To Jones)

JONES: Meet Prof. Bernstein. He helped me get a job at the Clarion.

LaRUE: What brings you downtown, professor?

PROF.: I've just met the editors at the newspaper and they want me to meet with the staff to discuss their writing. Maybe I could do it at the big round table over there? Do you think I could set up shop here? (LaRue looks puzzled and tosses a questioning glance at Jones.)

LaRUE: I guess the boss would okay it. Whatcha gonna have, Professor?

PROF.: Hot tea with lemon would be fine. And an order of unbuttered toast. (He watches as LaRue writes his order on her pad, something rarely done at this lunch room.)

JONES: Prof. Bernstein, you should see the little book my copy chief gave me last week. She said it will help my writing. Do you think my writing needs help?

PROF.: You remember the tough criticism we offered to each other in your senior writing course at State? I suspect your editor was recommending that same kind of thorough critique. I recommended the book you received. It can be a great help for the Clarion staff, but it cannot solve all problems associated with writing.

JONES: (A bit dejected.) That's all I need. Another rule book. I have a shelf full of grammar books, style books, dictionaries, directories. What can I do with them? How can I memorize all those rules?

PROF.: Consider the section on split infinitives in your new little book. (LaRue arrives with his tea and toast.)

LaRUE: Split infinit'ves? (She pronounces it with the accent on the final syllable). That's something I never heard of.

JONES: It's something college professors mark on your papers to show the correct way to write.

LaRUE: Does it make a difference? (She refills his coffee cup.)

PROF.: That's a matter of opinion.

JONES: Or tradition.

PROF.: Cappon's little book has an interesting narrative on this point. This fellow bends the rule a bit.

JONES: For good reason.

LaRUE: (She sets her coffee pot down and runs her hand over the simulated naugahyde cover and gold type of The Word.) This must be just like the Bible! It's almost as pretty. (She returns to the pantry.)

PROF.: It can be a welcome tonic.

JONES: (As he drops a tip for LaRue on the counter and prepares to return to his desk next door.) But it's more than a rule book. Right? (Lights dim and come up on a newsroom set. Veterana Smith, copy desk chief, stands beside a reporter at his VDT.)

VET: I'm going to program this computer to count the words in your leads, Jones. We want short snappy sentences. When you finish each story our system will tell you your average sentence length. (Jones manages a slight smile and nods his head.)

VET: Have you looked at that little book I gave you last week?

JONES: Yes, I thought . . .

VET: You know, Jones, you have real potential. I can see a great career here for you if we can just do a little polishing on your writing skills.

JONES: (Prepares to acknowledge the compliment.) I . . .

VET: Have I told you we have hired one of your former professors to give you more feedback on your writing? Not just you, Jones. All of the reporters and copy editors. Even the sportswriters.

JONES: Yes, Prof. Bernstein said . . .

VET: Not that he will tell you anything we haven't already said. But it will be coming from an outsider, you know, unbiased. That's what I like about that little book from the AP. It's unbiased. From the outside. (Jones spots the clock on the wall as the lights dim.)

More editors appealing to young

By Tom Burton
Myrtle Beach Sun-News

Most daily newspapers could be wrapped with a label reading: "for adults only: Contents of interest to those 30 years or older."

It's not that editors wouldn't like to attract more young readers — we like to think we provide information of interest to readers of all ages.

Still, you don't need research to tell how few young people are reading your paper. Just think when was the last time you saw a youngster voluntarily pick up a newspaper? Even then, the chances are he was checking the TV guide to plan a night's viewing.

Judy Hines, vice president of the American Newspaper Publishers Assocation, has been encouraging editors to give more consideration to those in their community who might not be interested in the property tax rate or what the city council did last night.

"On the whole, newspapers have been quite remiss on the teenage years, she says, adding that the effort to attract younger readers is a relatively new concept.

"We started talking about it in the mid-'70s, but it was hard to get newspapers interested," Hines says of the push to attract young readers. "It wasn't until close to 1979 or 1980 that they saw it was a problem."

Today most editors have at least made an effort to appeal to young people, though it's generally in the form of a weekly tab of puzzles and games.

"Newspapers are doing a lot more — everything from the syndicated Mini Page to their own entertainment and cultural items. It's like night and day when you compare what it used to be to what it is," Hines said.

Most of what editors are doing in the younger market can fit into one of several categories: Task-oriented features (games and puzzles), short educational feature stories (usually developed around a theme), school news written by students, advice columns or other mail-generated features of interest to young people, and school- or entertainment-related news releases.

The most talked-about success stories seem to be a mixture of the categories: Universial Press Syndicate's Mini Page, Gannett's Pennywhistle Press, the Louisville Times' Jelly Bean Journal and Newsday's Kidsday all use a combination of stories, games and advice aimed at students.

But because litte research has been done, just how successful attempts have been in reaching younger readers is difficult to determine. The best evidence most editors can offer is the quantity of mail response.

Gannett did have a group of Michigan State University researchers gauge the response to its two-year-old effort, Pennywistle Press.

The 1982 study found an average 45% of the children in homes with newspaper subscriptions read Pennywhistle every week over a month-long period.

The research also showed that 75% of the children studied like Pennywhistle as much or more than the Sunday comics and nearly half the children read no other magazines.

The Sunday supplement, which has 1.7 million circulation via 34 Gannett papers, also is popular with parents. A majority of parents subscribing to the Gannett papers (66%) reported that they encouraged their children to read Pennywhistle and a similar number said they taked to their children about stories in the edition.

Pennywhistle varies somewhat from paper to paper as editors choose from the material offered each week. But each issue is built around a theme — one week on parades, another on teeth, another on Africa. The most prominent feature is a color drawing illustrating that week's theme. At least three stories on the theme, including one piece of fiction, also are offered.

One-paragraph news briefs with photos of events and newsmakers, a short consumer story, an advice column, jokes, letters, a comic strip, games, a sports quiz, record and book reviews and television promos all can be part of the Pennywhistle package.

Julia Clark, assistant editor at Pennywhistle, says there is no secret to selecting story ideas for the paper.

"We read a lot to pick up ideas on what kids have done and are doing," she said. "They are like grown-ups in that they are pretty much interested in anything we can make interesting to them."

Clark says the four-person staff targets each issue primarily to the 8-12 age group, but mail indicates Pennywhistle is being read by children from 5 to 15.

The most widely-distributed pages for young people are syndicated through Betty Debnam's Mini Page. Universal has 500 subscribers for the weekly tab, more than twice the number of clients when it began syndication in 1977.

Alan McDermott, Universal's managing editor, says the Mini Page is aimed at students in kindergarten through grade 6, but he also said mail shows the paper was being read by older kids.

Though McDermott has no research to prove the extent of the Mini Page's audience, he points to a large volume of mail, the growing number of newspaper subscribers and the staying power of the product that makes it familiar to newspaper readers across the country.

Like Pennywhistle, the Mini Page allows editors to choose from a variety of features and to substitute local copy for the syndicated blocks. The Mini Page, however, goes less for splashy color graphics and feature stories in favor of more puzzles, games and short, fact-filled educational stories.

Newsday's Kidsday and the Louiville Times' Jelly Bean Journal probably are the most well-known locally-produced efforts.

Jelly Bean has been so successful that it has had an "ad hoc syndicate" to newspapers in New Orleans and Eunid, Okla., for six years, Times scene editor Greg Johnson says.

A free lance editor with a background in education generates almost all the editorial content for Jelly Bean, Johnson says. A copy editor and a staff artist also contribute some of their time each week to the 10-year-old Saturday supplement.

Along with expanded coverage of music and pop culture, Johnson credits Jelly Bean with helping the Times' Saturday editions sell 30,000 more copies than it does during the week.

Jelly Bean usually is three tab pages of graphics, educational feature stories, contests and mail from young readers.

"We don't just throw a bunch of riddles in a box and pass it off as a kids' section," says Johnson. "In terms of content, it might be the best product in the paper."

One of the longest-running sections for young people is in the Winston-Salem Sentinel.

Larry Queen, a former police beat reporter, has been editing The Teen Page since 1965. Unlike some other efforts, Queen's Monday-Wednesday-Friday page does without the traditional games and comics.

Instead, he selects 19 high school students who then write ambitious feature stories and interviews. He fills the page out with occasional advice and music columns from syndicates and concert reviews.

"We've been in the gondola of a hot air balloon, we've shot the rapids in a canoe and we've been on board the USS Independence. You name it, we've been there," Queen says.

Some of the most interesting copy produced for the page has been the student interviews of older celebrities, such as Guy Lombardo and Red Skelton.

"It's intriguing when a young person confronts them in an interview," he says.

Queen also is proud of some of the newsfeatures his staff, some of whom have gone on to successful professional journalism careers, have produced. The Teen Page has tackled teenage suicide, adoption at birth and looked at ways the economic recession affects young people.

"We think we do as well as the professional staff and we've been told that," says Queen.

Some less ambitious efforts have also been successful in attracting young readers, including enlisting students to illustrate the

weather or write guest columns, setting up a kids' "man on the street" opinion poll, spotlighting a teacher or student of the week in a feature story, running student essay contests and calendars of activities of interest to young people.

Still, the most easily recognizable way in which newspapers are trying to attract young people is in increased newsholes for sports and entertainment.

"It's a very tough level to reach," ANPA's Hines says of the young audience. "Their reading skills are not as good but the sophistication is very high."

Most of those putting out sections for young people have little in the way of advice or tips for a successful product.

"Avoid like the plague looking like you are talking down to the kids," offers Johnson. Most others interviewed agree.

"Try to find something that's both fun and interesting. Something that can be shared with people of all ages," suggests Cynthia Struby of the Charlotte Observer's Young Observer page.

"Get a rotating youth advisory board to get reaction to what you're doing," advised Hines.

But if the attempts do not succeed, editors might not be able to count on the young people as an audience when they get older and hence more interested in the more traditional newspaper fare.

"They may get in the habit of watching MTV and forget newspapers exist," says Johnson.

History 'incomplete' without news

By Joe Goodman
Winston-Salem Journal

Our hip-pocket survey of a few historians yielded this general conclusion: Though newspaper stories aren't history, they're a good place for a historian to start his reading. Almost by definition, news is too incomplete to serve as history. But then, history is incomplete without the news.

It would be nice if Arthur S. Link were a typical newspaper reader. "Newspapers constitute the starting point for research for all modern history," he wrote in a reply to our query. "We would be badly off without them."

Link, of course, is not a typical reader. He's a prominent American historian, probably best known for his book "American Epoch," a standard text on the United States in the 20th Century. He's also president of the American Historical Association and is editor-in-chief of the Papers of Woodrow Wilson at Princeton University.

He was one of the historians to whom we posed these questions:

- Do the daily newspapers you read write good history?
- Are they useful to you in your profession?
- How could they do better?

Link's answer to the first question read this way:

"I read the New York Times almost exclusively and have to say, on the basis of rather wide knowledge of newspapers throughout the world, that I think it is the best newspaper as a source of historical fact. Of course, one has to be able to discriminate between what might be called straightforward news and reports based upon leaks, gossip, rumors, etc. However the skilled historian can easily do this."

How can newspapers do better? "By being absolutely certain of their facts through better checking and research," he wrote.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. echoed Link's opinion. Schlesinger has won Pulitzer Prizes for history and biography and has written a hatful of books on 20th Century American history.

"Obviously the utility of newspapers to historians depends on the accuracy and thoroughness of the reporting," he wrote. "Historians will always be grateful to newspapers for eye-witness accounts of notable events. In some areas, notably perhaps in public policy, there are obvious obstacles to full and accurate daily reporting. Historians recognize this as newspapermen do and, in these areas, will rely more on other sources — generally on sources not immediately available to newspapermen on the job."

Don Higginbotham is chairman of the history department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"Of course, newspapers contain the materials of history," he said. Some of them are good, some are bad; all are valuable, if only for their slant or editorial views.

"But, as all our methodology books stress, newspapers are written on deadline, and we have to take that into account.

"Certainly historians find newspapers useful. They can't look at the subjects they study and deal with them meaningfully unless they understand the modern context. They must understand contemporary times to understand the past. How can they deal with political parties in the past if they don't understand what the parties stand for today? Television deals with things like that, of course. But television is just too superficial."

But Higginbotham has a pet peeve about newspapers.

"Their most serious flaw is their headlines and lead-lines. Even the most responsible newspapers have this problem. There is an argument for not having headlines at all," he said.

We didn't get good grades from all the professors.

John Hope Franklin is probably this country's most prominent black historian. He is a past president of the American Historian's Association and is a James B. Duke professor of history at Duke University.

"Many days I read two newspapers, some days I read three," he wrote. "As a historian of the 19th Century I am very dependent on newspapers to provide a great variety of information. At the same time, I am highly critical of newspapers today for what appears to me to be the absence of critical, objective handling of news regarding national leaders, the tendency toward sensationalism in reporting the news, and the manner in which so many papers — even the better ones — reflect in their editorial policies the views of their major advertisers.

"Why are our papers so charmed by President Reagan that they are unable to point out the bankruptcy and inconsistencies of his policies? Cannot they see that there is no connection between the right of Namibia to independence and the presence of Cuban troops in Angola? How many papers are outraged by the racial policies of South Africa that are at least as despicable as those of Nazi Germany? Aren't the members of the Fourth Estate dismayed by the scandalous conduct of the officials of the Environmental Protection Agency who permit companies to drive many of us to an early death by their pollution of the environment? Those papers that stand up for principle are in a hopeless minority, while the majority are either indifferent or insensitive to what is happening around them.

"I hope that in the near future the press in general will become more independent, more active in the drive to improve our society, and more vigorous in their examination even of those issues that cannot be transformed into sensational news stories," Hope wrote.

"Some editorial page!"

Editorial-page kitchen bound to over-heat

By W. Lawrie Joslin
National Conference of Editorial Writers

When he requested this piece on editorial writing, Trueman Farris told me many managing editors write editorials for their newspapers, or edit editorial pages.

Those required to perform such Herculean combinations of duties are the unsung heroes of our business.

If in what follows they find something to help them in their task, this project will have been worthwhile.

The luckier ones, those whose papers can afford editorial boards, may decide to pass this along to their editoral page editors. But none of what follows is likely to be new to them if, as should be the case, they already belong to the National Conference of Editorial Writers, under whose friendly roof ideas about editorial writing and ways to improve editorial pages are our food and drink.

The late Monty Curtis, affectionately known as Mr. API, in defining what makes a good newspaper even better, once said:

"There are two elements of greatness. One is the publication of exclusive stories of great significance. The other is courageous, strong editorial-page leadership which frequently has to take a minority position because in the early stages of any issue the majority is almost invariably wrong."

The essential message was that the best papers serve the communities in which they publish and don't attempt to dodge contentious issues.

That doesn't mean that the editorial page must always be in an adversarial position. But there must be no fear of being there when research and due consideration of an issue demand.

The editorial-page kitchen is bound to get over-heated at times if it is doing the job it should.

That's the first challenge for an editorial writer, including the managing editor who must combine editorial writing with other duties.

And the editorialist will find that issues closest to home will generate not only the

most heat but also the most interest in the page, according to readership surveys.

Don't shrink from taking on your community's problems. Just remember whatever is written about them should be researched with the same diligence as national or international issues, although background information about local issues may not be as conveniently at hand in the files.

Remember, also, that research and independence of view are wasted by those twin enemies of editorial writing: blandness and dullness.

Even time shows an abhorrence of the kind of dullness exemplified in what used to be referred to as the "wither Afghanistan" editorial by making Afghanistan a major issue.

What are the antidotes to "b" and "d"?

NCEW's guides for its page critique groups answer the question with other questions which the busy managing editor / editorial writer might usefully consider.

"Are editorials forceful, felicitious, topical and graceful? Is there verve and vitality . . . ? Is there a good mix of local, state, national and international topics? Is there a philosphical balance?

"Do the editorials consider opposing arguments? Do they ventilate complex issues and attempt to reduce them to understandable terms? If the editorial calls for action, does it say clearly who should act? . . . Would a reader believe the writer knew the issue? Would the editorial persuade? Are there gaps in the reasoning? Do facts get in the way of arguments or do they prove them?"

No employe of a newspaper is in a better position to spot editorial ideas than managing editors, because they see everything that goes into the paper. The content of the daily paper — be it political or social, near or distant — is the proper seedbed of editorial ideas for daily newspapers.

How those ideas are shaped will depend on the allocation of responsibility for the editorial page.

Managing editors who must write editorials or edit the editorial page probably have staff limitations which don't permit the luxury of an editorial board as such. Responsibility for uniformity of editorial policy will become theirs by default unless the publisher is willing and able to take it on.

In any case, channels between managing editor and publisher are essential to the determination of a consistent editorial viewpoint. On larger papers, the publisher may attend daily meetings of the editorial board. On smaller papers, regular, informal discussions of current issues between publisher and managing editor are a practical alternative.

The give and take of these meetings offers a way of minimizing possibilities for policy clashes.

There is, of course, more to putting out an editorial page that people want to read than good quality in the content of the editorials.

Page appearance should be an open invitation to prospective readers to come aboard.

Greyness repels readers looking for intellectual fodder even if it lies hidden — somewhere.

Again NCEW's critique questions, this time concerning format, are worth reviewing:

"Is the layout pleasing and inviting? Is headline size appropriate? Does the page attract readers or make them work for what they get?"

It goes without saying that articles such as this are no substitute for an API editorial page seminar or the critique sessions at NCEW annual meetings. The modest intention is simply to stimulate thinking among managing editors who have many other things on their minds — especially if they have to edit their editorial pages — about improving the editorial page.

All of us in this business know the importance of a good front page in building a paper's readership.

Not so well appreciated, perhaps, is the role of a good editorial page — the kind to which Monty Curtis referred — in expanding a paper's influence.

'Tailored' paper to answer dreams

This article was researched and written by Clark Hoyt of the Wichita Eagle-Beacon and Trueman Farris of the Milwaukee Sentinel.

Thousands of words pour into newspaper offices every day that never see print. Many of the stories would have high appeal to a limited number of readers but are crowded out of the newspaper by stories of wider interest. Discarded stories are a waste. A needless waste?

Every newspaper editor dreams of being able to get those stories of special interest in print and delivered to the readers who want them, who are willing to pay good money to get them.

The "tailored newspaper" may be an answer to editors' dreams in a few years. Some think that newspapers tailored for an individual reader or a specific group of readers may be the way to send newspaper circulation soaring to new highs.

Listen to John Naisbitt, author of the best selling "Megatrends." In a recent edition of Editor and Publisher, he was quoted as telling a meeting of newspaper promoters that more dailies may be forced to concentrate on special sections targeted to specific audiences of readers. He based his prediction on the swing from a centralized to a decentralized society.

Listen to Stanton Cook, publisher of the Chicago Tribune. At the same meeting he urged finding ways to use the 80% of information that newspapers receive but never publish. Cook said:

"Within the newspaper itself we must learn to speak more directly and authoritatively towards special segments of our readership and indeed, potential readership."

And listen to a message from the magazine world. In a story on the facelift of Rolling Stone magazine in Printing Impressions, it was claimed that new printing processes would permit Rolling Stone "to meet advertisers and even editors' increasing clamour for split demographic runs to cater to the needs and interests of specified reader and distribution groups."

As a managing editor, how would you like to produce pages or sections in your newspaper that vary from copy to copy? How about being able to give a reader who is a nut about automobiles a full section of auto news while his next door neighbor, who is a fishing fool, would get no auto news but a lot of fishing news in the same space? Can that be done?

Maybe not that finely, but it can be done. Today.

"The technical ability is all there, but how the hell do you get it delivered?" said Joe Ungaro of Gannett's Westchester County (N.Y.) newspapers.

In other words, Joe thinks it is (or will be) technically feasible to customize each newspaper for a particular reader, but he thinks getting the paper to that reader presents insurmountable problems. He thinks the only way to deliver a newspaper tailored to each reader is electronically, through such devices as Knight-Ridder's Viewdata.

But William Rinehart, vice president / technical of the American Newspaper Publishers' Association, holds exactly the opposite view: "I truly believe we will have the ability about 1995 to customize the newspaper in its entirety, to label and address every newspaper," he said. "The technology is coming . . . evolving toward the objective that we've got to customize — got to give the reader what he wants."

These are some of the technical developments that had led to Rinehart's optimism:

1. Pagination, combined with sophisticat-

ed electronic storage of not only text but graphics as well. Pasadena, with its All-Sports edition, made possible by pagination, was a pioneer. All-Sports wasn't customized for individual readers — it was an entirely different paper made up on the skeleton of each day's Star-News. But it was experimenting with some of the techniques that will have to be part of the production of the tailored newspaper of the future.

As technology improves and costs come down, Rinehart sees full-page pagination in wide use by 1990. He thinks systems by then will be more flexible for users, provide higher quality graphics and will cost between $500,000 and $750,000 compared to today's several million dollars.

2. Hard-copy photography. Rinehart expects that, by the end of the '80s, we'll be shooting digital photographs, bypassing silver film, and entering them directly from camera to computer. Photographs can be transmitted instantly from anywhere by telephone. This will give editors enormously increased flexibility in making — and remaking — pages for a variety of readers.

3. Satellite hard-copy delivery, or Sat-Fax. This sounds as though it will have its most immediate impact on the advertising side of newspapers. Sat-Fax will allow an agency in New York placing advertising for a major national account to transmit the entire ad, text, and graphics, laid out exactly as the agency wants. This technology, which Rinehart said is already feasible, though not in use anywhere yet, would also allow tailored newspapers to buy specific editorial packages, a custom comics / amusements package, for example, or a custom stocks package for those wanting more detail than the regular daily listings offer. Rinehart expects to see a Sat-Fax system in place somewhere by the end of the decade.

4. Standard Advertising Units (SAU) for marketing. Most of us are going to these standard sizes now. What do they have to do with a tailored newspaper? Rinehart says that when we're all working with SAUs, it will help the move to pagination. Systems won't have to be customized for each newspaper, which will cut hardware and software costs, speeding the process.

5. Ink-jet printing. This has two applications in the tailored newspaper. First, in the *mailroom, ink-jet printing will be used* to prepare individual labels for each paper with the subscriber's name and address — a code for what content that reader wants. The label goes on the front page, which becomes, in effect, the wrap for everything else. The customized material is inserted in an automated mailroom by machinery that reads the code on each label. Rinehart sees this available by the early 1990s. He says the Wall Street Journal, though not customizing its newspaper, is already using press-speed ink-jet labeling. The second phase of ink-jet printing comes when the entire newspaper is produced that way. Rinehart says he has witnessed experiments (he is not permitted to say whose) of an ink-jet process that would eliminate plates. An editor could remake a page while the presses were turning, press a button and transmit the changes instantly to the cylinder. He called this laser instant imaging of printing cylinders.

The technology exists — or soon will — to tailor at least portions of a newpaper's content for the individual reader, agrees Peter Walczak, sales representative for Harris Graphics Corp., newspaper press division in Dover, N.H. Getting the individualized newspaper delivered to the proper individual is the major problem with the concept, he also agrees.

After all, he said, Time magazine is varying advertising content for different geographic areas, some of them quite small, Walczak said, adding that if this can be done for ads, it also can be done for editorial content. He says Time could tailor each magazine for various economic groups, or for counter sales or home delivery.

Gerald Sanders, Midwest district manager, Harris Graphics, said that technology exists to insert into the main sheets of the newspaper expanded sections such as Sports, Business News, autos, fashions or whatever. The inserting machines can be controlled by magnetic tape prepared from a newspaper's computerized circulation lists, he adds.

Julius J. Farkas, director, product management, of Harris said that control systems already in use "could be integrated to provide the ability to custom assemble products and then address them to a specific subscriber." He goes on:

"Our combination of inserting equipment and computer based control is presently being used to produce selectively assembled packages to meet the zoning requirements of insert advertisers. A further extension of this technology could permit a newspaper to produce demographic customization by discrete special section. The special sections would be inserted based upon a subscriber's demographic profile to give him only those sections in which he has an interest. The completed package would then be addressed to that subscriber using ink-jet technology and then stacked for distribution."

As for ink-jet presses, there doesn't appear to be much chance that such presses can be improved enough in the near term for high-speed newspaper printing that would permit changes of stories and content, with computer control, for each newspaper as it flows through the press, indicated Ralph E. Smith, of the MGD Graphics Systems Division, Rockwell International. However, says Smith in a paper on the subject, there are some potentially major advantages to ink-jet presses that might speed efforts to improve those presses. Those advantages might include ability to update news and content quickly, elimination of printing plates, reduction of make-ready and start-up time and reduction of web breaks.

The bottom line appears to be this:

With computerized circulation lists, with pagination, with quick fix ink-jet presses, with sophisticated inserting machines, tailored newspapers might well become a fact before too many years. With one remaining problem; how to get the tailored newspaper delivered to the right customer?

But you've dealt with circulation problems before.

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